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OR,

The Island Lure.

BY LEON LEWIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE WATER GHOUL," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. AN AWFUL PLOT.

LATE on a lowering, gusty afternoon in autumn, a score of years ago, a dark-faced, wild-eyed man of middle age stood upon a high and precipitous bluff at the south end of Mapleton Island, in Lake Michigan, and looked moodily out upon the restless waters around him.

He was the picture of a dissipated and shiftless "poor relation," in every respect, from his scanty and ragged garments to his bloated and unshaven features.

The island in question is about seven miles in length, with an average width of two miles and a half or three miles.

It is both wooded and rocky, but its vales, slopes and shores afford as good grazing and

HE SWUNG A LANTERN ENERGETICALLY TO AND FRO, UTTERING LOUD CRIES
OF WARNING AND APPEAL.

agricultural lands as can be found in any quarter of the world.

Mapleton Island, at the time of which we write, had been owned and occupied for several generations by a family of that name, and the episode of real life we here narrate has been largely drawn from their annals.

A few yards behind the man of whom we have spoken, was a woman, seated upon the ground, of the same general aspect as her companion, but with a countenance almost fierce in its expression of disgust and dissatisfaction.

From the conversation of the couple that they were husband and wife was evident.

"You see where we stand, Molly," the former was saying. "My brother, who is 'Lord of the Isle,' and who really owns every stick and stone upon it, has given us a cottage to live in, and has even taken the trouble to see that we have something to eat, but there his kindness ends. He won't associate with us; he won't have us around. His ways are not our ways. He frowns upon all we do, and looks down upon us. Such a life as we've been living here for four long years! We might as well be rats in a trap! I'm tired of these privations. It's all I can do to scrape together the whisky and tobacco which render existence possible in this ground-hog corner of creation! I'm tired of being pointed out as a 'poor relation' of the 'Lord of the Isle.' I've nearly made up my mind to ask Harmon to send us back to Florida!"

"Then you're a bigger fool than I ever supposed you to be, Peter Mapleton," returned the woman, with mingled scorn and anger. "What! go back to the misery and drudgery we endured among the wreckers of the Florida reefs? Never!"

"Then what shall we do, Molly?" demanded Peter Mapleton, as he turned away from the bluff and sat down beside his wife. "Ask Harmon to establish us here upon a better basis? Ask him to make us a regular allowance of a thousand dollars a year and 'no questions asked,' or something of this sort?"

The woman shook her head, while a gleam full of malignancy crept into her dull eyes.

"It'd be in vain to ask Harmon to do anything of that sort, for us," she declared. "He has said, again and again, that we must make our own living upon the few acres he has placed at our disposal. He wants us to be independent, and to have the blessedness of feeling that we earn all we get," and she sneered bitterly. "Besides, you must remember that he wants all he has got for his son and for that ward of his. He thinks we're lazy, shiftless, unscrupulous, false-hearted and false-tongued, too fond of the bottle, too fond of low company—"

"Whew! Anything more?" interrupted Peter Mapleton, sarcastically.

"He knows," pursued Mrs. Mapleton, "that you were once a wrecker on the Florida reefs, and that your hand has been turned to many a job it wouldn't do to talk about. I fancy he fears you. Perhaps he thinks you'd poison him, if he were to allow you the usual intimacies of a brother. Be that as it may, he has no intention of doing any more for us than he has been doing."

"Then what are we to do, I ask?" and Peter Mapleton looked more disgusted than ever. "There are hardly clothes enough upon your back to wad a window sash! There's not enough in the house to furnish a meal for a cat!"

"I know what I'd do if I were in your place, Peter," said the wife. "I'd soon be Harmon's heir, notwithstanding the existence of his son and his ward. You're substantially the next of kin. How easy to pass from the condition of a poor relation to that of sole heir! How often such a change has been made! If Harmon were to die, and his son were to remain abroad, you would have complete possession of the island and of everything on it. And how easy for Harmon to die at any moment! A shot from behind some stump or log, as he goes through the woods! A single push, as he looks from the top of some cliff!"

"Easier said than done, Molly," returned the husband thoughtfully. "During the four years we have been here, I haven't had a single chance of the kind suggested. If he does not really fear me, he evidently has misgivings as to what I am capable of doing. He never goes anywhere with me. He has never trusted himself alone in my presence in any lonely situation. He has never hunted in my company, or even taken a walk along the beach with me. Brotherly love, indeed! He leaves us to rot in our sty, while he lolls in his palace, and the points of contact are so few between us that it has been a fortnight since I saw him."

He continued in this strain for several minutes, his every word and glance attesting how envious and jealous he had become of his brother.

"Well, so much the more reason for getting rid of him by the shortest and easiest method," suggested Mrs. Mapleton anew.

"True, but the task is not an easy one," was the response. "I should never dare tackle him unless I took him at a great disadvantage. He's stronger and quicker than I am."

"And yet, you are so near his size and so much like him that you've more than once

been mistaken for him! If you dressed like him, and got yourself up to resemble him, the mistake in question would be made oftener. It seems to me that your general resemblance to him ought to be turned to account, although I haven't yet thought out exactly what can be done with it!"

The husband smiled significantly.

"You know I've already traded on this resemblance," he said, "have collected money in Harmon's name and so on, but have you forgotten how quickly he brought me up with a round turn for so doing? Don't you remember that he threatened to have me locked up if I ever permitted myself any further liberties of the sort?"

"So much the more reason for getting rid of him," repeated the wife. "But, you never will! I have always known that you are afraid of him. If I had been in your shoes, Peter Mapleton, I would have got rid of him years ago. If you had the spirit of a man, you would not leave me dying by inches in such a situation as Harmon has assigned us. If you stand in such awe of him, why don't you do here as you did in Florida—work in the dark? What is there to hinder you from turning wrecker again?"

"Here? In Lake Michigan?"

"Why not? Some of the most valuable ships and cargoes in the world traverse these lakes, passing within a few miles of us, their movements depending upon a single light. Have you forgotten how to show a false light successfully, now here, now there, with or without a favoring storm, in such a way as to run your ship ashore just where you want it to strike? Has it never occurred to you how nicely we are placed here for a work of this kind? Have you made no friends on the island who would join you in such a work?"

"Hush, Molly!"

Peter Mapleton looked nervously around.

"I have really been thinking of this very thing," he confessed. "We were never so well situated in Florida for such a career as we are now. Every ship going up or down Lake Michigan must pass under our eyes, as it were. The fogs are as bad here as they are on the banks of Newfoundland. The storms we have here are often as fierce as those of the Atlantic. These islands are planted at just the right distance one from another, to afford us extra facilities for the proposed business. In a word, Molly, I've given the idea the fullest attention, and have decided to turn wrecker, in the good old style of the Florida reefs!"

"You have, Peter? Then your head is level, after all!" exclaimed Mrs. Mapleton, as her grim features relaxed into a pitiless smile. "How easy to make oceans of money! With a spy at Detroit, and another at Chicago, with suitable connections, we can keep the run of all the commerce of the lakes, and know just when and how to strike. Just think of that tug which passed the other day, with a hundred thousand dollars in money, to pay the men at the copper-mines of Lake Superior! How often we may have chances of this sort! But you are silent, Peter! What are you thinking about?"

"About something that will please you, Molly," and Peter Mapleton smiled in his turn, as he arose and began pacing to and fro excitedly. "There are a number of people here who will turn wreckers with me, so that we can start in strong-handed. But, that is not all. I've thought of a way in which I can get square with Harmon, at the same time!"

"You can? Be revenged upon him for his treatment of us, you mean? How?"

"I'll soon show you, Molly," and the sinister smile of Peter Mapleton deepened. "As you have suggested, Harmon and I are much alike as regards size and build, and even looks. He's the smoothest and best fed, to be sure, but on a dark night, in a slouched hat, and dressed in his somewhat peculiar fashion, I'd pass for him readily, under certain conditions."

"Explain yourself fully, dear," invited the wife, her mien suddenly changing from stern to caressing.

"Well, this is my idea," pursued the husband. "I'll have an apoplectic fit to-night, as soon as we get home, dropping as suddenly as if shot, and lying on the ground, with staring eyes and frothing mouth—in the style of old Benson, you know, who died last summer. Of course I won't die, but I'll remain perfectly helpless, to the extent of being unable to speak or turn over in bed, to say nothing of feeding myself or combing my hair. As soon as this pretense has been generally accepted throughout the island, and I'm supposed to be a bed-ridden paralytic, we shall be ready for business!"

"How ready, Peter? I don't quite understand—"

"Why, I'll get up and disguise myself to resemble Harmon, and can then steal forth any dark night, when there's a promising ship in the case, and resume my old trade of wrecker. And not only can we make a pile of money in this way, but I shall be supposed to be Harmon, if detected at this work, and in due course the name of my good and kind brother will figure as that of the wrecker-in-chief!"

The woman comprehended the awful plot of her husband in all its entirety, as was attested by her flushed cheeks and blazing eyes.

"Peter Mapleton, there's more in you than I supposed!" she declared, as she arose and advanced to his side and caressed him. "What you propose is magnificent! Money and revenge in the same breath! As you will figure as a helpless paralytic, who's always at home, always in bed, suspicion for your acts can only fall upon Harmon! You may even carry on the business in his name to such an extent and in such a way as to cause him to be arrested, tried and hanged, thus leaving you in full possession as his heir and successor!"

"Yes, Molly," and a vengeful gleam leaped to the eyes of the degenerate brother. "I see that you understand me! This idea shall bear splendid fruit! Let's get back to the house and discuss the plot in all its details. This very night shall see us started on the high road to fortune!"

Arm in arm, the evil couple walked away from the brow of the high cliff, with flushed and smiling countenances, and with an eagerness and hopefulness to which they had long been strangers. They saw their way out of their privations and annoyances at last! Their watchwords were henceforth to be *Plunder* and *Revenge*!

CHAPTER II.

THE SON AND HEIR.

It was three years later.

The plot of Peter Mapleton and his wife had been duly carried out.

Pretending to have a fit, Peter had taken to his bed as a helpless paralytic, and the role thus assumed had been accepted as a reality by every one on Mapleton Island.

Gradually, however, Peter and his wife had taken into their confidence a number of desperadoes and fugitives from justice, who had taken refuge in this lake solitude, and in due course they had entered upon their project of casting away ships by means of false lights, and had been only too successful.

What losses of property they had caused!

What losses of life!

Seldom showing their false light twice in the same spot, and always changing their procedures to meet the requirements of every case and situation, they had caused a profound sensation among the navigators of the lakes, and had even created such a panic in some circles as to drive many a mariner and trader out of the business.

The *Flying Glim*—as their false light was generally called—had become the terror of the waters in the vicinity of Mapleton Island.

Once or twice the nefarious gang had operated as far eastward as Lake Huron, and as far northward as Lake Superior, so that their fatal light had naturally acquired the reputation among the more ignorant and superstitious classes of the community of being a sort of *will-o'-the-wisp*—a water devil's lamp, for many persons even believed in the supernatural character of the roving false light, and were ready to ascribe it to the Evil One himself, as was quite excusable, in view of the long impunity it had enjoyed, and of the fatal and terrible results which had so often followed its appearance.

Now here, now there—as Mrs. Mapleton had suggested; at times seen through the shadows of a fog or the mists of a tempest, and at other times blazing out upon the clear air and calm waters of a beautiful summer night—it had become as much of a mystery as of a terror, the more especially as various attempts to get hold of the secrets behind it had remained wholly fruitless.

Strange and terrible scourge!

When was its iniquitous work to cease?

When were its dire puzzles and problems to be comprehended?

Near noon of an autumnal day, a roomy steam-yacht, much larger than those habitually employed in the police service of our harbors and rivers, lay at one of three or four little piers in front of Lake Park, in Chicago.

Two or three of the crew were visible on the craft, in addition to an engineer and fireman, and a number of loungers had collected on the piers to witness the start, as is usual in such cases.

Walking slowly to and fro beside the yacht, with a careless and yet thoughtful mien, was a youthful, athletic figure which would have attracted attention in any situation.

This personage was a well-known lake pilot named Walter March.

Suddenly, an elegantly-attired youth of about Wally's own age came across the railroad tracks which skirt the water-front at this point, and attracted the attention of the young sailor not merely with a glance but also with a gesture.

"Where is this boat bound, sir?" demanded the new-comer, as he came to a halt near Wally, whom he saluted politely.

Wally invited him by a gesture to the gang-way and led the way in that direction.

"I am not at liberty to answer your question, sir," he then said, in a tone too low to reach the ears of even the nearest of the bystanders.

"Not at liberty—"

"Caution! Not a word before these people!"

The new-comer looked puzzled a moment,

and even somewhat annoyed at the answer given him.

"Is the captain here?" he asked.

"The captain—yes," answered Wally, indicating a tall, finely-formed gentleman, in plain clothes, who was walking nervously to and from the yacht. "But it will do no good to speak to him. He can give you no other answer than I have done."

"I see! You are awaiting orders."

"And also the orderer," added Wally, with a smile. "If you choose to wait until our chief arrives—and I may tell you that I expect him every moment—"

"Thanks. I will wait," interrupted the young stranger, with nervous eagerness. "It's my only chance."

He surveyed the young pilot more earnestly and critically than he had yet done, and the result, as was easy to see, was a sudden respect and interest.

The fact that Wally was his peer in years seemed an additional title to his confidence.

"Let me tell you, sir, just how I am situated," he said, coming nearer to Wally and speaking in a lower tone than before. "Boys should be friends the world over. My name is Paul Mapleton. I have just arrived from Europe. My home is at Mapleton Island. There will be no regular boat in that direction until Friday, and I must either wait until then or charter a special conveyance, unless you should happen to be going that way. This is the whole secret of the inquiry I have addressed to you, and I shall be very thankful if you will speak a good word to the chief for me, in case you are bound down the lake."

Wally comprehended perfectly.

"I will do what I can, Mr. Mapleton," he declared, "but nothing can be done until the chief's arrival. Ah, there he is," he added, suddenly catching sight of a figure which had come down Adams street and was approaching rapidly. "Suppose we step that way to meet him, so that you can prefer your request without being overheard by these idlers?"

Young Mapleton assented.

The face of the new-comer was flushed with exertion, and it would not have been difficult for a keenly-observant man to detect an air of suppressed excitement in his aspect and manner.

Having encountered this man, young Mapleton stated his situation and desires in as few words as possible.

"Mapleton, of Mapleton Island?" was the first response of the chief, as he scanned the boyish countenance before him with singular intensity.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Mapleton, the 'Lord of the Isle,' as he is sometimes called—its owner and occupant—is my father!"

The strange look of the chief became still more intense.

"Singular!" he ejaculated.

"I have been absent in Europe several years, sir," added young Mapleton, "and am naturally most anxious to reach home. If you are going down the lake—"

The chief interrupted him with a gesture.

"You can come with us," he said. "Excuse my bluntness; but, as you see," and he waved his hand toward the cloud of steam escaping from the yacht's boiler, "we are all ready for a start."

He led the way aboard, making a gesture to the commander, and then entered the cabin, the two youths following him.

"Be seated, Mr. Mapleton," invited the chief. "Will you mind giving me some confirmation of your name and your long absence in Europe?"

"Not in the least, sir."

He hastened to do so, producing letters, hotel bills, and various other documents which perfectly confirmed all he had said.

"Thanks," said the chief, returning these documents, after he had taken cognizance of them. "Let me respond to your confidence in kind. I am Colonel Gibson, the Chief of Police of Chicago. This young man is Walter March, a popular lake pilot."

Young Mapleton bowed his thanks for the information.

Chief Gibson paused for a moment, glancing out of the cabin to see that the boat was already leaving the pier, and then resumed:

"I am starting out upon a secret expedition, mission, investigation, or whatever we may call it, and it may not be possible for me to proceed direct to Mapleton Island. All I can promise is that you shall be landed there as quickly as my plans and duties will allow."

"That is all I could expect, sir," returned young Mapleton, smiling understandingly. "A thousand thanks for your kindness."

"And since you are one of us, for the time being," pursued Chief Gibson, as his eyes again reverted to the face of the handsome youth as keenly as before, "I do not mind telling you, in confidence, the nature of our proposed investigations."

"In confidence, of course," returned the guest.

"For some time past," continued the chief, "and especially during the last three years—during your absence in Europe, I may say—there have been a number of shipwrecks on the lake, which have been caused by false lights, that is

to say, by lights exhibited with evil intent by persons unknown!"

A shadow of dark concern crossed young Mapleton's face.

"I have seen some account of these disasters in the newspapers sent me, and also in my letters," he said, with honest candor. "Did not some of these wrecks take place near Mapleton Island?"

"They did!"

The young passenger's look of concern deepened.

"There are only too many reasons for believing," resumed Chief Gibson, "that there is a gang of wreckers in the neighborhood of Mapleton Island, who are making a business of casting away vessels. What is worse, a number of passengers who have been cast ashore insensible are believed to have been murdered in cold blood by these wreckers for the sake of the money or other valuables upon their persons!"

"Horrible, if true!" exclaimed young Mapleton, with deep emotion.

"That there is more or less truth in these suspicions has been proved beyond all question," declared Chief Gibson with a final keen glance at the young passenger's face. "The nature of the injuries in many cases has shown clearly that the victims of these catastrophes were neither drowned nor dashed against the rocks, but were purposely killed!"

The passenger bowed, comprehending perfectly that the present mission of Chief Gibson was to hunt out and bring to justice the unknown miscreants of whom he had been speaking.

"So much for the business which occupies us at this moment, Mr. Mapleton," finished the chief. "Please make yourself as comfortable as possible, and do not think hard of my pilot or myself if we seem to neglect you. We'll exchange a word with you when we can. You may even be able to give us some valuable information concerning the region to which we are going. Please excuse us for the present."

And with this, Chief Gibson called the attention of Wally by a gesture, and led the way to the deck, leaving young Mapleton alone in the cabin.

"Strange! strange!" muttered the youthful passenger, clasping his hand to his heart, while an ashen pallor gathered on his face. "These revelations cut me to the quick! I fear I am to be in some way associated with those terrible crimes. Why did Chief Gibson look at me so strangely? Is the name of Mapleton implicated in the deeds of those murderous wreckers? Strange, too, that I have met the chief and that I am his passenger and guest! Ah, this voyage will prove as fateful as eventful!"

As has been indicated, the steam-yacht had already left her pier and entered upon her voyage, taking her way swiftly down the lake.

The city of Chicago promptly began fading out of sight in the distance.

"Off at last!" exclaimed Chief Gibson with an air of intense relief. "The last two or three days have been a constant torment."

"We have indeed had a great many things to arrange, sir," returned Wally.

"True, but that has not been the worst of my trouble. My fear has been that these delays would be fatal to our project by attracting too much attention to us. Look back at the pier we've just left!"

Wally acted upon the hint.

The loungers who had gathered to witness the departure of the steam-yacht had all vanished—with a solitary exception.

This exception was a middle-aged man, in the garb of a laborer, who had been lounging two or three hours in the vicinity of the pier, and was now half-concealed by one of its large posts following the movements of the steam-yacht with the greatest interest.

"You see what I mean?" pursued Chief Gibson. "That man is evidently watching us—either in his own interest, or in that of some employer. It is only reasonable to suppose that he is associated with the wreckers, and that they will in some way be warned of our coming!"

He advanced to meet his commander, who was pacing to and fro on the deck, and exchanged a few remarks with him, but soon came back to Wally.

"You've often taken this trip, I suppose?" he said.

"More times than I can remember, sir. I began as a mere boy of half a dozen years."

"You are familiar with the region of the Beaver Islands?"

"Very, sir. I spent a whole summer there, smoking out a gang of counterfeiters."

"You know all the lights, even the newest?"

"All, sir, except the one which is now the especial object of our attention—the *Flying Glim*," replied Wally. "I know the real lights of the lake too well to be cheated by any 'counterfeit presentment' of them!"

The chief heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

The serious lines of his countenance attested how grave were the problems pressing upon him.

Taking the arm of his young pilot, he began walking to and fro, lowering his voice to a whisper, as he continued:

"The fact is, the presence of that youngster,"

and he ossed his head toward the cabin, "is a very singular incident in our affairs."

"He's all right, isn't he?"

"I think so."

"You seemed to look at him very searchingly."

"I will tell you why, frankly."

The chief remained silent a moment, as if making sundry mental corrections in his ideas, and then continued:

"Of the existence of a gang of wreckers in the vicinity of Mapleton Island there cannot be the least doubt. True, the false light has been shown at a considerable distance from that point, and has twice appeared on the mainland, but on every occasion it appears at some spot where the designs of the wreckers are especially favored by the difficulties of navigation. We know already that Mapleton Island is the central workshop from which all these villainies have been launched."

Wally shared this opinion fully.

"And now to surprise you," pursued the chief. "I suppose you know the history of the island as well as you know its situation—to whom it belongs, by whom it is occupied, the number of persons upon it and their pursuits—in a word, all that any one need know about it. You are of course familiar with the name of the owner and principal occupant, Harmon Mapleton, who is generally known as the 'Lord of the Isle.'"

"Yes, sir. He's the father of our young passenger."

"Very well, Wally. And now for the surprise."

He placed his lips near the ear of the young pilot, and added:

"Everything we have learned thus far seems to point directly to the fact that the 'Lord of the Isle' is the leader of these wreckers!"

Wally recoiled in pained amazement.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed, in a tone which attested that he had already conceived a strong liking for young Mapleton.

"It is only too true, Wally," assured the chief. "The proofs already in our hands are incontestable!"

"But, why should he be guilty of such desperate crimes?"

"He is deeply in debt, it seems, and has recently executed a large mortgage upon his estates. It is said that he long since sold all the bonds and stocks in his possession, and that he has lost heavily in various operations he undertook, in the hope of recovery his lost footing."

"But who says he's the leader of the wreckers?"

"He's accused by a young man who has long been in his employ—a certain Rufus Bunnell. This Bunnell is himself a very dubious individual, and all he has said appears to be prompted by some sentiment of personal revenge. He has been in Chicago a number of weeks, hanging about the Secret Police, and endeavoring to sell his information at a large figure, and I've naturally kept one eye upon him while devoting the other to the investigation of the facts and suggestions he deigned to offer!"

"And when you saw our young passenger—"

"Yes, when I heard his request for a passage, I naturally suspected that his father was playing a bold game, and had dispatched him on a tour of discovery. The conversation I had with him, however, was enough to clear my mind of all its suspicions. I'm sure he's honest."

"He certainly seemed struck by what you told him—as pained as astonished!"

"That was clear enough. It must have occurred to him that all these horrors of wreck and plunder are coming too near home, and that Mapleton Island is terribly in question. He may even have some idea of his father's pecuniary distress, and of the consequent possibility that the 'Lord of the Isle' has yielded to a terrible temptation. As a matter of fact, the young man winced more than once at my remarks, and became pale and excited. But, enough of these matters for the present. By to-morrow, at this hour, we shall be near the scene of action, and I shall have more to say to you."

And with this, Chief Gibson turned away and re-entered the cabin, with a resolve to extract from his young passenger all that he knew about the history, topography and hydrography of Mapleton Island.

CHAPTER III.

THE "LORD OF THE ISLE."

THE sun had long since vanished, a dull canopy of clouds having crept over the face of the heavens.

The night was at hand.

In a square and roomy cupola, which crowned a large and handsome edifice, a man of some fifty years sat at a telescope of compact form but of powerful capacities, looking out upon the broad bosom of Lake Michigan.

This man was Harmon Mapleton, the "Lord of the Isle," as he was popularly termed, especially by his considerable body of servants, tenants and dependents.

As indicated by this term, he was the sole owner of the island bearing his name, which had belonged to his father and grandfather before him.

The northern end is a wedge-like point, while

the opposite extremity is forked, much like a bootjack or like the letter U.

About a quarter of a mile from the southern end, and exactly at the head of the bay formed by the two arms, or forks, was situated a light-house, some thirty feet in height, upon a foundation at about this distance from the water.

This light-house was a round, stone tower, some eight or ten feet in diameter at the base, and was painted white, and supplied with the apparatus for a third-class revolving light.

Just behind it was a little cottage occupied by the light-keeper.

The southern forks of the island are as sharp and jagged as the jaws of a shark, being almost wholly composed of rocks, some of which rear their crests a score of feet above the water.

The villa of the Lord of the Isle had naturally been erected near the center of the island, from which point the surface slopes in every direction toward the lake.

This villa displayed marked pretensions to beauty and elegance, and was scarcely equaled by any other between Chicago and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The grounds around it, comprising a full thousand acres, had long been in a high state of cultivation, and were as remarkable for their fertility as for their beauty.

Here and there, adding a charm to the landscape which nothing else could, were visible the neat cottages of the laborers.

Of course all these laborers were more or less fishermen, so that there were plenty of boats on the island.

There were even several little inlets at convenient points which served as landing-places.

There was nothing very remarkable in the appearance and conduct of the Lord of the Isle, except that he seemed to be singularly anxious and preoccupied, and to be in the act of scrutinizing very keenly, with the aid of his telescope, all the principal features of his surroundings.

"There is going to be a thick fog to-night," he mused, as he turned anew to the instrument. "I can already see its forerunners upon the horizon. It will be just such a night as those terrible men have so often selected for their work!"

He referred of course to the wreckers of whom Chief Gibson had spoken.

Pointing the telescope to the south and southwest, the Lord of the Isle scanned the surface of the lake for nearly a score of miles in that direction.

And as he looked, the expression of pain and preoccupation upon his features became more and more marked.

"Yes, the night will be dark and stormy," he resumed, "and yonder, a dozen miles away, is a three-masted schooner that will be in no pleasant situation. She is evidently one of those ocean-going vessels which carry such valuable cargoes. The breeze is neither fine nor favorable, nor likely to be such, so that she will not be abreast of us until late in the evening. Will an effort be made to destroy her? Ah, I'll be wide awake to-night!"

He swung the telescope on its pivot, so that it looked to the northward, and then to the right and left, thus completing a careful survey of the scene around him.

"Strange where those men are hiding!" he muttered, in a hollow whisper. "Strange I can get no trace of them!"

Again he looked at the craft which had fixed his attention.

She was still so far away that her hull was scarcely visible, on account of the convexity of the earth, although he saw clearly enough by the cloud of canvas presented to his gaze that she was one of the largest vessels he had ever seen upon our inland waters.

"I thought I saw a smoke, as if a tug were alongside," he soliloquized. "What I saw must have been the fog closing in behind the schooner. If that craft has been seen by these mysterious wreckers, they're almost certain to form some design upon her, in view of the state of the weather."

He closed the windows on the four sides of the cupola, and descended a staircase leading to a wide hall, and thence to a spacious sleeping apartment, where he dropped into a large easy-chair, the thoughtful look deepening on his features.

"Are you there, guardy?" called a musical voice at the bottom of a second stair-case—the one leading to the ground floor.

"Yes, Dorie."

Light footsteps resounded on the stair-case, and the sweet-faced, bright-eyed girl of some seventeen summers came bounding into his presence, exclaiming:

"Oh, I am so happy, guardy! Paul is coming home at last from Europe! He was to start immediately, and may be at this very moment within a few miles of us? Here's his letter."

"Read it, dear."

The maiden seated herself on a hassock at the feet of her guardian, and complied with the suggestion.

The letter was dated from London, scarcely more than a fortnight before.

Its writer was the young passenger, Paul

Mapleton, whom we have seen upon the steam-yacht of Chief Gibson.

It was brief, but declared that Paul was tired of the Old World and was coming home as fast as steam could bring him.

It closed, as it began, with tender expressions of regard for the young girl.

"There is a postscript, guardy," added the maiden. "It is only this:

"I would sooner look into your eyes, darling Dorie, than see all the 'sights' in the world!"

Dear, delightful Paul! He's always the same!"

Her guardian rubbed his hands contentedly, his face brightening.

"Our wanderer is not so sad a dog as I feared," he declared, as he patted the golden head before him. "He has borne in mind my oft-repeated injunctions. He has not only traveled and studied, but he has come back to you, heart free, and will soon be your husband!"

The fair face bent still lower, a bright tell-tale blush passing over it.

Every word, every look, every action from the moment of her appearance upon the scene, had indicated how entirely Paul Mapleton had taken possession of her heart and became the ideal of her dreams!

"Let me see the date and post-marks," said her guardian, after a pause.

The girl complied.

The Lord of the Isle reflected a few moments intently.

"The boy will not be here till Saturday, since there is no boat from Chicago before Friday," he declared.

"See that his rooms are made ready. How charmed he will be to see you! Not the pale, delicate little girl he left you years ago, but a lovely woman! I am glad you are both about to realize the one great dream of my life," he added, rising and passing into the study adjoining his sleeping apartment. "From the moment when your parents died, all these years ago, leaving you to my care, and especially since the death of my wife, Paul's mother, I have never ceased for a moment to think of you as my son's future wife, and it will not be my fault if you are not soon one of the happiest little wives in the world!"

The fervor of the maiden's caresses attested how agreeable these assurances were to her.

"By Saturday morning, then," she murmured, "you think we may expect our wanderer?"

"Yes, or Saturday noon at the latest," replied the Lord of the Isle. "There is no necessity of my giving any directions about the preparations. You are already competent to give lessons to Mrs. Mansion in housekeeping, as clever as she is!"

He pressed his lips to the forehead inclined to his breast, and took his seat at a desk at one side of his study, adding:

"I shall be busy, Dorie, during the evening, with the quarter's accounts, and may possibly run over to Big Beaver with Gridley and Rossbrook for two or three hours. Deny me rigidly to anybody who may call, even to Mrs. Mapleton, my sister-in-law. Even if I should change my purpose and remain at home, I cannot see any one—no one whatever! You understand me, Dorie?"

The maiden assented, a thoughtful shadow mantling her face.

After retreating to the door, she suddenly retraced her steps, seizing her guardian by the arm.

"Guardy," she said, "I wish you would not trust Gridley and Rossbrook as much as you do?"

"Why not, dear?"

"I fear you are deceived in them! They're not what they seem!"

The Lord of the Isle started, looking at once curious and interested, as his glances settled upon the girl's face.

"What do you know about them?" he asked.

"I—I overheard them quarreling about the division of some money, guardy. The dispute seemed to be about a sum of money they had found upon a corpse that came ashore—I did not learn when or where. They also spoke of a gold watch and other jewelry. What if they should be bad, guardy. You know I'm not capable of blaming any one for their looks, but you must agree they are both possessed of countenances you would not care to meet in a lonely place after sunset! What if they should belong to that secret gang of wreckers which has so long been the terror of these islands?"

"Nonsense, child," returned the Lord of the Isle, with assumed lightness. "Who has been talking to you about wreckers? Mrs. Mansion?"

"She has only said to me what everybody is saying, guardy," exclaimed Dorie. "There cannot be the least doubt of the existence of the gang in question. False lights have certainly been exhibited at different points in these islands. A number of vessels are known to have been cast away on purpose. I do not believe in the Will-o'-the-Wisp, guardy. Old Corry, the light-keeper, only makes himself ridiculous by claiming that all these shifting lights are explained by a 'gathering of phosphorescence' which skips from point to point. The 'fire-ball'

of John Thornton is equally far-fetched. No, guardy, let us dismiss all these fallacies of superstition, as also all the false theories promulgated by the wreckers to conceal the facts. There is a gang of ship-plunderers concealed upon these islands or near them. And what if these men, whom you trust so much to row you to or from Big Beaver or the mainland, at all hours of the night, should kill you and throw you into the lake for the sake of your money?"

The Lord of the Isle remained silent a few moments, without removing his gaze from the fair face of his ward.

"Dorie," he then said, "I must be frank with you. You are wiser than I thought. There is such a gang of wreckers as rumor has depicted. There is a deadly reality behind all the chatter concerning the Will-o'-the-Wisp, or this Flying Glim, as some call it—to which you have alluded. For months I have been making every effort to unearth these terrible offenders, but I have failed to get the least clew to them!"

He heaved a profound sigh, drawing his breath hard, as one who struggles with a heavy load of anguish, and continued:

"Perhaps I may as well go a step further, Dorie, and tell you all I know. As most of these crimes have been committed in and around Mapleton Island, the attention of the authorities has been concentrated in this quarter. In a word, Dorie, it is reported—or at least suspected—that I am the head of the wreckers!"

"You, guardy?" and the features of Dorie Ames paled to a deathlike hue.

"It is even so! There have been detectives here to investigate the situation, and they profess to have discovered that I have been seen at the head of the wreckers! That I have directed these criminals in their nefarious work! In a word, that I am the principal author of all this wickedness!"

The maiden sat as if petrified.

"Now, what can be the secret of these horrible accusations?" demanded the Lord of the Isle. "If my brother were not a helpless paralytic, who has not left his bed in three years, it might be possible for some action of his to give rise to these rumors, as I know that Peter has very few scruples, not to mention that he was for a long time a wrecker in Florida. As the case stands, however, there can be no pretense that any one is imitating Peter for me. You see from all this, Dorie, what anxieties are pressing upon me. Why I have asked you to deny me to everybody is to secure the opportunity of remaining on the watch throughout the night. I have resolved to play the detective. I am going to make an effort to solve the mystery of these accusations. In the mean time, Dorie, I hope you will fret as little as possible about them. Remember that the truth is bound to be discovered and established sooner or later, and that we have nothing to fear."

He again pressed his lips to the maiden's forehead, and then seized his hat and cane, descending the stairs and taking his way by a side door to the lawn in front of the dwelling.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHASE OF THE FLYING GLIM.

REACHING a commanding elevation near his villa, the Lord of the Isle came to a halt, looking keenly around.

The night had set in dark and gloomy, as expected, and the fog he had foreseen was beginning to creep in from the horizon.

"I see no one watching me—no trace of an intruder," he ejaculated. "Yet, doubtless, there is more than one detective on the island! Tilford writes me that the Board of Trade of Chicago has taken action upon the project of sending some of the boatmen of the Secret Service in this direction. Heaven grant that these efforts to solve this appalling mystery may be successful! In the mean time, I'll see what I can do, personally."

He struck into a well-defined path leading across cultivated fields and pastures to the east side of the island.

Here, in a little inlet, he found awaiting him a row-boat, in which were two men, who arose respectfully at his approach.

They were the two whose names Dorie had mentioned with such misgivings—Gridley and Rossbrook.

Their looks were all she had asserted, to any one sufficiently observant to penetrate the hypocritical mask with which they habitually covered their mien and actions.

Gridley was a small, wiry personage, some forty years of age, with a long beard, which was already plentifully besprinkled with gray, while Rossbrook was a beardless young man of two-and-twenty, with a figure at once herculean and athletic.

"You're all ready for a start?" asked the Lord of the Isle, as he came to a halt beside the boat.

"Yes, sir," answered Gridley.

"How long have you been here?"

"Not three minutes, sir. We took care, as you suggested, not to come here until we had the darkness for a cover."

"You have not breathed to any one a word of your intentions?"

"No, sir. We have been as still as the grave!"

Harmon Mapleton drew a long breath of relief, as he took his place at the stern of the boat. "You are armed?" he asked.

"Precisely as directed, sir," replied Gridley, to whom Rossbrook seemed willing to leave the whole conversation.

"Very well, my men," said the Lord of the Isle, with another sigh, as he glanced anew with his most searching gaze into the darkness around him. "I may as well give you some idea of my intentions. To begin with, you are aware that a false light has been shown again and again upon these islands, until it has become a terror and bugbear to all navigators who have occasion to pass them?"

The two men exchanged significant glances in the darkness.

A half contemptuous smile appeared on Gridley's features.

"You refer to the *Flying Glim*, sir?" returned the latter, after a brief pause. "You'll excuse me for saying there is no false light in the case. It is what learned men would call an *ignorant fatuus*, sir. We agree with Johnny Thornton that it's nothing more or less than a collection of gas which forms in some swamp on the mainland, and goes dancing and flickering over the islands and waters, now here, now there, according to the strength and direction of the wind."

The Lord of the Isle looked from one to the other of his men in mute astonishment.

What a curious view of the case had been thrust upon him, as it were, at the very commencement of his researches!

No false light in the case!

The mysterious lights were phantoms!

"What are your reasons for taking this view of the matter?" he demanded, his glances continuing to alternate from one countenance to the other.

"Reasons, sir?" repeated Gridley. "I didn't suppose anybody regarded the *Flying Glim* as a reality. I've seen just such lights on the yard-arms and mast-heads of ships at sea, especially in the low latitudes. But that isn't all, sir. Rossbrook and I have seen the *Flying Glim* almost every night for a month past, and until we give no sort of attention to it!"

"Seen it?" queried Harmon Mapleton, looking more and more puzzled.

"Just as plainly as I see you at this moment, sir," answered Gridley. "We've even chased it although we might as well have spared ourselves the trouble since it retreated as we advanced, and the only result was that we tumbled into a creek and got a good wetting!"

"What was it like?"

"Why, like a big fire-fly, or like a dull lantern, half hidden in bushes! Ah, there it is now!"

The effect of this communication was electrical.

The Lord of the Isle gained his feet excitedly.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"There! just abreast of Rasher Point."

"On the water, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. Drifting around the point. There!"

"Ah, yes," acknowledged Harmon Mapleton, as he leaped ashore. "I see it!"

He was as puzzled as curious.

What he saw was just such a light as Gridley had described—a dull gleam, almost a flicker, uncertain of size and outline, which moved erratically, now up or down, now to one side and the other, as if floating at random in the air.

"What is it?" he queried involuntarily.

"Impossible to say, sir!" returned Gridley. "I only know that we call it the *Flying Glim*, or the *Fly-by-Night*! Just what it may be, sir, is too much for such ignorant chaps as Rossbrook and me to undertake to decide!"

Harmon Mapleton continued to watch the antics of the strange light as if fascinated.

"It has come ashore!" he at length whispered.

"Keep quiet here! I'll make a dash for it!"

He suited the action to the word.

He had not run a dozen rods, however, when he tumbled headlong over some obstacle in his path, the shock causing considerable noise, not to speak of a startled exclamation from the lips of the explorer.

When he recovered his footing, the mysterious light had vanished!

In vain he scanned the vicinity of Rasher Point.

"Strange!" he ejaculated, with a sort of involuntary awe. "What can it be! And where can it have gone?"

Even as he spoke, the strange glimmer dawned upon his vision again, from a point a score of rods up the coast, and on the other side of a deep creek that he could not have turned dry-shod in less than a quarter of an hour.

"The very same!" he commented.

The strange light danced and fluttered, waving and flickering, precisely as before.

What a ghostly visitant it seemed!

The Lord of the Isle could not help realizing how well calculated it was to infect ignorant men with the belief that it was something supernatural.

"I'll try it again!" was his thought.

Slipping off his coat, he quietly waded into the

creek, and swam for the opposite shore, taking care to make as little noise as was possible.

In due course he reached the opposite bank, climbed out, and made swiftly for the spot where the strange glimmer had been seen.

What a surprise here awaited him!

The strange light still remained visible, to be sure, but it remained a score of rods away from him—as far away as ever!

Despite all his sense and philosophy, the Lord of the Isle began to incline to the popular view of the phenomenon he had witnessed.

Might not the *Flying Glim* indeed be a ball of gas, or a gathering of phosphorescence, which had emanated from some swamp, some pile of rotting brushwood, or some decaying fish or animal?

Still, he did not immediately give up the chase.

He again moved rapidly in the direction of the mysterious light, noting anew its dances and flickerings, but he was not long in discovering that he could not hope to overtake it, and even as he halted in uncertainty it became unusually agitated, as if it had got into a vortex of currents, and the next instant it drifted rapidly downward into the waters of a small indentation of the coast, and vanished from the view of the watcher.

For a few minutes the Lord of the Isle remained motionless, scrutinizing earnestly all the features of the scene around him, but the mysterious light did not reappear.

"As well wait for a lantern which has been extinguished!" he at length muttered, as he began retracing his steps to the boat. "Evidently there is something more in this business than I had imagined! I'm as wholly 'at sea' in regard to the phenomenon as any man on the island!"

It was with a strangely preoccupied air that he finally returned to his men.

"Well, sir?" greeted Gridley, with a freedom that bordered upon triumph.

"It has eluded me, sure enough," was the answer.

"Although you swam for it," observed the man, with a glance at the wet and clinging garments of his employer.

"Yes, Gridley. You may leave the boat here and go your ways until morning. I will not take the trip contemplated—at least not until I have gone back to the house and changed my garments!"

"All right, sir. You will, of course, let us know if you want our help at any hour of the night?"

"Of course, thank you."

And with this the Lord of the Isle began retracing his steps to his dwelling, soon vanishing alike from the view and the hearing of his employees.

"So much for his attempt to discover the false light!" muttered Gridley, as sarcastically, as scornfully, as he looked after the retreating figure of his employer. "He'll have to be sharper than that, if he hopes to know all we know, my boy! You see, Bob, what sort of a night it's getting to be? Ten to one there'll be work for us between now and midnight. Let's look in a moment upon Peter Mapleton, and see if he's likely to have a job for us!"

"Agreed, old man. We can at least get a good glass of whisky."

And with this the two men walked quietly away toward one of the principal little bays on the northeast shore of the island.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

NEAR the shore of the little bay in question stood the cottage which, seven years before, had been placed at the disposal of his unworthy and envious brother by the Lord of the Isle.

It was the opposite of pretentious, but it was nevertheless a comfortable and picturesque cottage, of six or seven rooms, in the midst of a lovely lawn and garden, with tall, graceful trees around, and a white, pebbly beach in front.

The spot was not merely as isolated as any spot could be on Mapleton Island, but it was somewhat shut in on the land side by a ridge running parallel with the coast, and especially by a considerable stretch of woods with which the crest of this ridge was covered.

Here, in this snug retreat, had lived Peter Mapleton and his wife ever since they turned up, empty-handed and disgusted, from a career of crime on the Florida reefs which had left them fugitives from justice.

The Lord of the Isle knew them too well to have any marked association with them.

It was very seldom indeed that either of them had passed an hour at the villa.

It was well understood, however, that the Lord of the Isle was not inclined to allow his brother to want for anything necessary to his comfort, and the kindness of heart of the former was sufficiently although unobtrusively proven by the frequency with which he would call around and spend a couple of hours with his relative, especially since the latter had been figuring as a helpless paralytic.

In one of the principal rooms of the ground floor of this cottage, lay Peter Mapleton, stretched ostentatiously upon a bed which occupied the most prominent spot in the room, it

being placed between two windows in such a way that the view of its occupant could command the door of the house and all the three approaches to it.

Paralytic and bed-ridden!

Such was the universal view taken of Peter Mapleton, ever since the fateful night, when, three years before, he had pretended to have an apopleptic fit, in accordance with the plot narrated in a former chapter.

As he had designed and arranged, only his wife, and those they had taken into their confidence, knew that he was "playing possum," to use his own language.

It seemed singular, to be sure, to many who saw him on his bed, moaning with pain and unable to lift his hand to his head, that he should have such a full, muscular figure—such clear, bright eyes—such a florid and healthy complexion—but this singularity did not lead any one to a suspicion that he was shamming—that he was no paralytic at all—that he was as well and hearty as ever!

At the moment we look in upon him his wife sat before a small fire which had been kindled upon the hearth rather for company and cheerfulness than warmth.

They were both better dressed than when we first saw them, and they were bedecked with a profusion of jewelry, but in all else they were little changed, except that their countenances had constantly grown more and more ignoble and forbidding.

"You're not worrying about what Corry said, I hope?" remarked Mrs. Mapleton, as she turned a keen gaze upon her husband.

"Not in the least, Molly," answered the pretended paralytic, as he removed his pipe from his mouth and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "Corry is dissatisfied in two particulars—with the smallness of the returns from our ventures, and with the number of what he is pleased to call our 'victims.' But Corry is as deep in the mud as I am in the mire, and he will have to show the false light just as long as I choose to demand that service at his hands!"

"But is it true that the authorities are going to send detectives here and make an investigation?"

"Nothing is more likely, Molly. But let 'em come! If we cannot get a good chance to knock them on the head, we can at least prevent them from discovering our secrets."

"Is it true that your brother is getting on the anxious seat to such an extent that he has resolved to turn detective?"

"Perfectly. Ha, ha! I am glad to see that he has fallen under suspicion, and that he is at this moment about as miserable as a man can be. Be sure that I will keep the ball rolling until his life is a burden."

"Hush! Here he comes."

Footsteps had indeed resounded, which the trained ears of the couple had no difficulty in recognizing, and the next instant the Lord of the Isle appeared at the open door of the cottage.

"Come in, Harmon!" cried the pretended paralytic, with a hypocritical smile. "This is good of you—to come a second time within a week to visit a helpless invalid. Sit down. All well at home, I suppose?"

The Lord of the Isle assented, accepting the chair Mrs. Mapleton placed at his disposal.

"No further news of Paul, I suppose?" continued the pretended invalid.

"Yes. He writes that he is about to return to us," replied the elder brother, making an effort to cast off the gloom which had taken possession of him. "We may expect his arrival at any moment."

"Indeed!" commented Peter, and the husband and wife exchanged secret glances full of bitterness and annoyance.

"And to what a heritage of shame he is returning, Peter!" continued the Lord of the Isle. "Are you aware that a terrible blight has fallen upon my name? Has any one told you that I am suspected of being the head of those murderous wreckers who have so long made these islands their headquarters?"

"No, Harmon. Is such the case?"

"Such is the case, Peter, and I have come here to see if you can make any suggestion as to how this report has arisen. Of course you are never out of doors?"

"Never, except to sit in my big arm-chair on the veranda. As you know, brother, I have not taken a step in three years."

"You never ride out, do you?"

"Never."

"You have no associates or intimates who for any reason should assert to the contrary of what you have just stated?"

"Not one. How could they? Everybody knows my unfortunate situation—unable to dress or feed myself. But what are you coming to?"

Only to the conclusion that there is some horrible plot on foot against me, of which I cannot form any clear conception, Peter," declared the Lord of the Isle, in a voice husky with anguish. "I see only that some person unknown is trying to ruin me! Is it not possible that the leader of these ship-plunderers has disguised himself to look like me?"

"That is indeed likely."

"But who can the man be? Do you know of a single suspicious character on the island?"

"Not one."

"You have imparted to no one what—what you learned of wrecking on the Florida reefs?"

"Certainly not, Harmon. I have never talked of that portion of my history to any one save you."

"Then the mystery deepens!" and the Lord of the Isle arose uneasily, and began walking to and fro with nervous strides. "I was afraid, for a moment, that some indiscretion on your part might have put some bad man in possession of the information necessary for this dreadful work. Well, well, all you can do is to keep your eyes and ears open, and try to assist me in unraveling the thread of these mysteries. There are one or two other matters I wished to speak about, but I am too excited to speak about them at present. Perhaps I will see you to-morrow. Your health is no worse than usual?"

"No, thank you."

"You are not in need of anything?"

"Not the least thing, brother, thanks to your constant kindness."

A few further remarks were exchanged, and the Lord of the Isle took his departure.

He had been gone but a few moments when Gridley and Rossbrook made their appearance.

"His lordship has been visiting you, I see," said Gridley, with a smile, as he entered. "We have been concealed near the cottage for a half-hour past, waiting to see if he would be uncivil to you. Evidently he is still as ignorant as ever of the little game you're playing?"

"Yes, and long may he remain so. Sit down, Molly, hand out some whisky. Did his lordship carry out his engagement for this evening?"

"Yes, and we arranged to let him have a chase of the Flying Glim," communicated Gridley, with a laugh. "But he merely got the traditional wetting for his trouble."

He briefly narrated the "chase" in question, as we have told it to the reader.

"Well, we're rid of him for the night," said Peter Mapleton, as he sprang lightly from the bed, "and now to work! I am going to wreck that three-masted schooner, and it's time to be moving. Take another drink, and we'll be off!"

The extra drink was soon disposed of, while Mrs. Mapleton took a survey of her surroundings from the front door and lawn, reporting that no one was lurking about the premises, and then the three men hastened from the cottage, the pretended paralytic leading the way with a tread as firm and active as that of a lion!

As soon as he was gone, Mrs. Mapleton closed the door of the cottage and extinguished her light, as was her practice on such occasions, thus leaving it to be inferred by any one passing that way that the family had retired for the night.

But she did not go to bed.

She simply seated herself near one of the front windows, with a revolver within reach, in readiness for any contingency that the night might develop.

It was thus that she covered the absence of her husband, passing the interval in watching and waiting.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALSE LIGHT.

At the entrance of the light-house we have mentioned, sat its keeper, staring vacantly into the night, in a reverie, which, as could have easily been seen, was of a most painful description.

He was a little old man, with an unquiet eye and furtive glance, a thin and hungry-looking face, an unkempt beard, long, scanty hair, and with an air that was at least forbidding, if not absolutely repulsive.

He wore neither coat nor vest, and his hairy arms were bare to the elbows.

"Just such a night as Peter wants it to be," he muttered uneasily. "Such a night as makes me shudder! Peter is sure to have seen that three-master! And it is equally certain that he has remarked the fog and the state of the weather. He'll be here soon enough and sure enough—the more's the pity!"

He looked nervously around, drawing his breath hard, and a grim determination could have been read upon his rugged features.

"Would that I were a thousand miles from this spot!" he sighed. "Would that I could never see that man again! Ah!"

He started violently at sight of a figure which had suddenly appeared at his side, and which he at first took to be the Lord of the Isle, but which a second glance told him was Peter Mapleton.

The resemblance the unworthy brother had managed to put on was startling.

There were the same figure, the same dress, the same eyes and hair, the same general aspect!

It was only when the villainous face received due attention that Peter Mapleton, in such a situation, could have been told from his brother.

Evidently the conspirators had some retreat where this matter of disguise, as well as all other necessary business, could receive due attention.

"I hope your observation does not apply to

me, Corry," said Peter Mapleton quietly, as he lighted a cigar.

"Well, it does," replied the light-keeper, with an air of desperation. "I was in hopes you'd never come near me again for any purpose whatever!"

"Indeed? How could you be so cruel? I have need of you, man. From what I have seen of wind and weather, it's going to be a favorable night for our business. There's a full three-masted schooner in just the situation to fall into our clutches!"

"Sure? I didn't see her!"

"I did, Corry. You must remember that I have a big eye in the top of my private and exclusive residence—as good a telescope, in fact, as that which gives so much comfort to my brother."

"I wish you hadn't, sir," declared the light-keeper as he seated himself at the opposite side of the door from that occupied by Mapleton. "I hope you haven't come here to propose to me any more jobs of that nature."

The air of the man was more than forced and constrained.

It was suppliant, repentant, and remorseful.

The arch conspirator looked at him in amazement, and as he looked, a sort of consternation came over him.

These remarks were too entirely in accord with some previous declarations of the light-keeper to be agreeable.

"What! turned pious in your old age, Corry?" sneered Peter Mapleton. "Or have you really become chicken-hearted?"

"I have simply sickened of acts which, always repulsive, have at length by force of repetition become intolerable," declared the light-keeper, earnestly. "You remember the last ship we cast away? You remember the seven dead bodies we had in a row, including those of the mother and daughter, and the two babies? From that day to this I've seen nothing else! There might have been a dozen persons lost on that terrible night!"

"We only found seven!"

"That was because the brig struck on the extreme outer point, and most of the bodies, like most of the wreck and cargo, were swept away from the shore. And what did we get for all that blood and horror? Less than a thousand dollars, Mr. Mapleton—not even a thousand—although there are nine of us to divide it!"

"Yes, we got more than that!" affirmed Peter Mapleton, with grim satisfaction.

"We did? What was it?"

"We got a black stain upon the name of this proud brother of mine that he will never get off!" declared the degenerate scion of the house, as his eyes flamed luridly. "We got more than one eye turned in this direction that will continue fixed upon him until he is carried off to the gallows! Oh! I cannot tell you how much I hate that man, Corry, and how much I would dare and do to accomplish his downfall and ruin!"

"With all that I have nothing to do, Mr. Mapleton," declared Corry. "What I want is to withdraw forever from all this violence and crime, and I will!"

"I see!" cried Mapleton. "You're tired of the business because it does not pay as we expected. But it was merely an accident that the ship struck where it did. It should have struck in the 'crotch of the boot-jack,' and in that case we should have made a splendid haul!"

The light-keeper shook his head energetically, heaving a sigh.

"Be that as it may, I am tired of the business," he declared, "and my mind is fully made up to have nothing more to do with it."

"Have you told the rest so?"

"No, sir. I thought it only fair to speak to you first."

The dark face of Peter Mapleton partially cleared of the frown that had settled upon it.

"That is what I would have expected of you," he said. "That was sensible."

He moved along the bench a yard or two, placing himself nearer the light-keeper.

"I agree with you, Corry, in a general way," he said. "We have pursued this business about far enough, as you say. Paul Mapleton will be home in a day or two, and I should not dare do anything after he is again with us. He is not only as sharp as a steel-trap, as you know, but he is honest and true and brave. He would not stoop to do a mean or wicked thing to save his life. In a word, he's like his estimable father, and the unworthy brother sneered like a demon.

"If he suspected me of being what I am—the leader of the band of wreckers who have been doing these things—he would be the first to denounce me."

"True," confirmed Corry. "Paul is a noble boy, and I have long been wishing for his return from Europe, knowing that his presence would put an end to this wickedness. Oh that my wife and son had not been taken from me, Peter Mapleton!" he added. "I would never have fallen under your baleful influence if they had been spared to me. It was only because you represented to me that I was about to be removed by the Government that you won my consent to our first crime. And, once in the downward

path the second step naturally followed the first. Oh, that it were all to do over again! I'd die a thousand deaths rather than take the first step with you!"

"Hear me, Corry. I appreciate all you are saying. To-night is our last night. Stand to your guns once more, Corry, and I will never ask you again. I'm as sick of all these horrors as you can possibly be. But we must have money—you as well as myself—to get clear of this part of the world within the next few days. More than that, Corry," and he lowered his voice to a whisper, "we must have money to buy the silence of Gridley and Rossbrook, who are quite capable of betraying us, so greatly have they been annoyed at our late failures."

"They're dangerous, you think?"

"Unless we manage to get something handsome for them, so that they can immediately take their leave of these scenes forever! As you must have noticed they are drinking like fish lately, and are becoming a constant peril to you and all of us. If we leave them where they are, they'll soon betray us in their cups, especially if, as you fear, there has been some step taken by the authorities against us."

The light-keeper sighed again.

"Are you sure no enemy is lurking near us, Mr. Mapleton?" he asked.

"Perfectly. I have been as watchful as a wolf for days past, and am absolutely certain that there is not a single stranger on the island. The only craft visible at nightfall was that three-masted schooner. I know just what she is. I know what she carries, and I know that we shall make a haul through her that will make us forget all past failures forever. For all these reasons, Corry, can I depend upon you for this last venture?"

"It is these last ventures which bring to grief all the rascality in the world," declared the light-keeper, groaning again, as he regained his feet abruptly. "But I yield to your arguments with the understanding and agreement that it is for the last time. Let the result be what it may, I will never raise hand or foot in this business again!"

"Thanks, Corry. I knew I could depend upon you. I will let you know when the blow is to be struck. Caution and courage!"

And with this he turned briskly upon his heel, disappearing in the direction from which he had come.

"This settles you, my fine brother," he muttered, as soon as he was clear of the old light-keeper. "I know that detectives will be here to-night from Chicago! I know that the work of this night will be laid to the charge of my brother! He will pay the penalty for what I am doing! This last stroke accomplished, I will wait quietly at my cottage until he has been cleared out of my path forever. Ha, ha! my fine brother! Little do you imagine how soon I am to be your successor! I, too, will soon be the 'Lord of the Isle.'"

The night had not merely set in with an intense darkness, but also with one of those thick fogs which are so common on Lake Michigan at certain seasons of the year.

Pausing upon a high bluff, Peter Mapleton held up his hand to the breeze a moment, to assure himself of its force and direction, and then made a rapid mental calculation.

"The three-master is in a good position to be tricked by us," he muttered. "We have only to suppress the light on Mapleton Island for half an hour, and at the same time show a false light on the Patsey Reef, to get the schooner ashore upon the Outer Beaver. We're perfectly sure of her, if there should be no change for the worse in wind and weather."

He walked on to another high bluff—one of the highest on the island—and came to a sudden halt, uttering a low and peculiar whistle.

A moment later, he was joined by two men, who proved to be Gridley and Rossbrook.

They came out of a dense group of pine which had evidently been planted to form a place of concealment for the lookouts of the gang which had so long terrorized the island.

"Where is Bunkle?" asked Peter Mapleton, after a few unimportant remarks had been exchanged.

"He's at his post, sir," answered Gridley.

"And Collins?"

"He hasn't been seen since last Monday!"

At this information the eyebrows of Peter Mapleton became corrugated to such an extent as to threaten a descent upon his nose.

"Between you and me, boys," he declared, "I have a lively suspicion of Collins. There have been detectives here, and I have reason to believe Collins has squealed for all he is worth. Fortunately he does not know as much as I do about the false light. If he appears again, be prompt to notify me. I'll call him to account!"

At this moment footsteps resounded at no great distance, and even as the trio looked inquiringly in the direction from which they came a man with a countenance nearly as rufianly as that of Peter Mapleton made his appearance.

"Ah, Collins!" cried the leader of the wreckers, with a startled air.

"As you see, boys."

"Where have you been since Monday?"

"At my mother's, on Great Beaver!"

"The point is not essential, Collins," declared Peter Mapleton, "but it is nevertheless one of those last feathers which break the back of the stoutest camel. I happen to know that you are just returned from Chicago, where you have been visiting Chief Gibson. I happen to know that you are a traitor! Take that for your trouble!"

A report resounded, and Collins for one brief moment gave himself up for lost, as he fell to the ground stunned, with the blood flowing freely from an ugly wound in his temple.

The next instant, however, he was vanishing down the hill with the speed of a racer.

It was in vain that several shots were fired after him; he made good his escape.

"Let him be killed at sight, wherever you may see him," growled the chief savagely. "And now to work!"

The great eye of the light-house, with its regular flashes, was sending its beams far out into the darkness as energetically as ever.

The fog was increasing rapidly.

Taking from one of the branches of a pine tree near him an ordinary water pail, in which was a lighted lantern, Mapleton signaled Corry at the light-house by drawing the light out of the pail at irregular intervals and returning it promptly to its concealment, thus conveying his wishes just as readily and clearly as if he had conveyed them by the "ticks" of a telegraph.

Then he made similar signals to his confederate upon the reef in the distance.

At the next eclipse—on the southern or water side—of the revolving light in the light-house, this whole side of the lantern was suddenly enveloped in a thick tarpaulin, which cut off its every ray in the direction of the three-master, without interfering to any noticeable extent with the light shed upon the interior of the island.

And the next instant, precisely as if the light on Mapleton Island were shining again, a false light appeared on the reef some three miles to the westward.

The substitution of the false light for the real one had thus been effected.

To the three-masted, or to any other ship advancing in the distance, the detection of this substitution was simply impossible, since the difference in the bearing of the false light could only be ascribed to the yawing of the ship from its course during the eclipse.

This terrible trickery could only be successful wherever and whenever accomplished.

The endangered ship, in steering by the false light, was certain to strike upon some obstacle in her course, instead of safely traversing the usual channel.

This was the nature of the business carried on by the wreckers, as well as the *modus operandi* of their crimes, and very rarely indeed had it happened that their intended prey had escaped them.

CHAPTER VII.

IN TROUBLE.

THE Lord of the Isle had not gone out into the night alone.

He had been followed by his ward—by Dorie.

A number of suspicious circumstances, other than those she had mentioned, had come to her knowledge concerning Gridley and Rossbrook, and it was not without a keen anxiety that she contemplated the relations of her guardian to them.

He had scarcely left the villa, therefore, as related, when she resolved to follow him and watch over him, for at least a portion of the evening.

Dorie was as brave as beautiful, and did not give a thought to the darkness of the night.

Her guardian had been so kind and generous to her that she regarded him almost as a father—especially since a marriage had been talked of between her and Paul—and she had conceived for him an unbounded respect and devotion.

For a time, while the light of day still lingered, and the Lord of the Isle remained within view, she had not dared to pass out of the gardens by which the villa was surrounded.

But when the shadows had begun deepening, and her guardian had vanished in the direction of the coast beyond the light-house, she stole into a path leading from the gardens, and struck out across the fields in the direction he had taken.

Nothing was further from her thoughts than an intention of acting as a spy upon his movements or proceedings.

All she desired was to assure herself that he was not in danger of getting into trouble.

Having passed the light-house and the cottage beside it, she comprehended that she had gone as far as a proper discretion permitted, and came to a halt at an old stone-fence which had once been a boundary between two separate farms.

As she sat thus, with an occasional turn in the direction of the shore where the Lord of the Isle was looking for the *Flying Glim*, as related, the night descended around her.

At length, becoming weary and possibly a little uneasy about her personal safety, she arose and advanced slowly in the direction of the great fiery eye—the light at the top of the light-house

—which had been sending its beams since sunset out into the surrounding shadows.

She was as busy with her thoughts at that moment as was ever a honey-bee with its flowers.

What a nice guardian was the Lord of the Isle!

How kindly he had spoken of her proposed marriage with Paul!

Continuing her progress as noiselessly as a fawn, she had nearly reached the light-house when the great light above her head suddenly vanished.

An intense blackness closed in around her.

Yet even as she staggered backward, extending her hand, as one gropes in blindness—for the sudden change had bewildered her—she saw another great light three miles away, upon a dangerous shoal, at a point where she had never before seen one.

At sight of this double transformation, the maiden recoiled still more violently, uttering an ejaculation of wonder.

If she had been astounded at the disappearance of the light from the light-house, how much more was she startled and surprised to see a similar light come into being in the distance.

"Merciful heavens! what's the meaning of this mystery?" she ejaculated.

She had not merely spoken without any consciousness of doing so, but she had spoken in the loud tones so natural to such a state of excitement.

A moment later a hand touched her on the arm, while footsteps resounded beside her, causing her a thrill of terror.

Half-turning, with a suppressed cry of alarm, she was just able to make out the outlines of a human figure which had halted within a yard of her.

"I'll tell you what the mystery is," declared the new-comer, answering the maiden's involuntary question. "That is, if you are really anxious to know it!"

"You here, Rufus Bunnell?" returned Dorie, scanning the speaker's countenance as well as she could in the darkness. "I supposed you were in Chicago!"

"And so I have been," avowed Bunnell, who was a somewhat coarse but shrewd young man, a couple of years older than Dorie. "In fact, I went to Chicago the day after Harmon Mapleton thrust me out of his employ because I had dared to ask his permission to pay my addresses to his beautiful ward!"

A sudden start of the maiden expressed her profound astonishment.

"Is that why you left guardy's employ?" she asked.

The new-comer assented.

"I am sorry you did not speak to me before speaking to guardy," she declared, "and so have saved your place. I would have persuaded you not to say a word to him on the subject. You have been on the island several years," added Dorie, with charming frankness, "and I have always considered you a respectable young man enough, but we've never had more than a passing acquaintance, and—really I am surprised that you should have demanded the permission mentioned!"

"You mean to say that you do not care for me?"

"As a suitor—certainly not, Mr. Bunnell," avowed Dorie, frankly but kindly. "I could never think of you as a suitor for my hand. Guardy has other views for me, and I have other views for myself. But let us drop a subject which is probably as disagreeable as useless. You said, I believe, that you could tell me what that light is?"

"Yes, I can!"

The voice of Rufus Bunnell was harsh and discordant, and his manner excited.

"I would thank you to do so. It puzzles me greatly."

"Let it do so no longer! That light, Miss Dorie, is the terrible false light, the *Flying Glim*, which has already lured so many unsuspecting mariners and travelers to their death!"

The maiden looked as incredulous as startled. As little as she liked Rufus Bunnell, she was obliged to clutch him by the arm to save herself from falling.

"You cannot mean what you say," she exclaimed. "It is too horrible!"

"Horrible or not, it is as true as the fact that I see you at this moment," declared Rufus Bunnell. "Would you like to verify my statement? If so you need not be half an hour about it. I have a boat within a few rods of us, and shall take pleasure in rowing you off to this false light, if you care to know more about it."

Naturally the maiden hesitated.

The measure was a bold and dangerous one, and her escort doubtful.

But a thought of the lives which had been sacrificed by that perfidious light was enough to decide her.

"I will go," she responded.

"Quick, then! We must move rapidly or the wreckers will put out the light before we get near it. This way."

He turned and retreated rapidly to the beach—the spot from which he had come, in fact—and Dorie followed him.

At the beach lay a small row-boat, with muf-

fled oars, in which Bunnell placed Dorie, he then seizing the oars and striking out swiftly and noiselessly for the false light.

"Caution! not a word," he whispered, with as many glances behind him as before him.

Dorie Ames heeded the injunction of her conductor, and the boat sped on in silence, guided by the false light nearer and nearer to its destination.

At length the boat halted, Bunnell steadying it with the oars till it seemed motionless.

"We'll not go nearer," he said, in the same guarded tone as before. "If we do, we shall be seen by the wreckers, and they'll kill us as spies. Yonder is the false light," he added, "and you realize at a glance how difficult it would be to the ordinary navigator of these waters to tell it from the real one!"

What Dorie saw was startling.

The false light was on the central crest of a reef Dorie had often remarked when sailing in the vicinity.

In a word it was the well-known Patsey Reef. The central crest in question is elevated some twenty feet above the water.

In the center of this elevated rock had been drilled a hole two feet in depth and three inches in diameter.

Into this hole, as into a socket, had been fitted the extremity of a stout iron post.

At the top of this post was visible such a light as that displayed by the light-house on Mapleton Island, with just such an apparatus and movement.

At the base of the rock a number of men were crouching, one of them holding the end of a cord by which the false light could be extinguished at any moment.

Three or four rods away, on the western side of the reef, lay a boat in which these men had arrived from the Outer Beaver, with all the fixtures appertaining to the light.

A couple of men were on guard in this boat, with their oars in readiness for use at the least sign of trouble, or of a hostile presence.

All these men were armed as if they had the intention of giving desperate battle to any one seeking to explore their nefarious secret or to interfere with their projects.

A few rapid glances put Dorie Ames and her conductor in possession of all these circumstances, and then the latter gave to his oars a few noiseless movements.

The boat began retreating as silently as it had come.

It was soon sufficiently beyond the circle of illumination around the light for its occupants to be in no special danger of detection.

"That is the false light, then?" murmured Dorie, as soon as she dared to speak.

Bunnell assented, resting on his oars.

"And who are those men we saw crouching on the rocks, under the light?"

"They are a portion of the wreckers—a portion of the gang by which the false light is exhibited."

"I'm afraid. Let us go back to the island!"

Bunnell resumed rowing.

He did not display any marked signs of exertion, but the boat nevertheless moved swiftly.

"Ought we not to raise an alarm?" asked Dorie, after a brief pause. "Suppose we warn the ship they're trying to wreck."

"Impossible! She may be miles away!"

"But we can go to meet her," insisted Dorie.

Bunnell was silent a few moments, the boat continuing its rapid progress.

"It may be possible to save her," pursued Dorie. "We can tell those aboard of her that they are steering by a false light and are likely to dash their ship in pieces upon one of the outer islands?"

"It would be of no use, Dorie," returned Rufus Bunnell. "I gave this information to the captain of the last ship that was wrecked by the false light, and he did not so much as thank me for my advice, not to mention his refusal to follow it. The fact is," he added, "he took me to be one of the wreckers, and thought that my advice was intended to cause the wreck of his ship on the Beaver Reefs!"

The maiden reflected a few moments in gloomy silence.

"As to raising an alarm," added Bunnell, "it would simply lead to our murder. These men would at once spring into their boat, and come like lightning to the spot from which the alarm proceeded. They have the keenest sort of lights with which to hunt us up, and it would be impossible for us to escape their notice or to avoid their clutches!"

Dorie heaved a sigh.

"Then there is no way of saving the ship from destruction?" she murmured.

"None. She is doomed!"

Another silence succeeded, the boat continuing its swift retreat, but at length Dorie became conscious of the duration of the trip she was taking.

Already the false light was becoming dim on her sight.

"Where are we?" she suddenly cried. "We ought to have been back to the island long ago, Mr. Bunnell!"

"We are near it."

"Then why is the light so dim?"

"Because of the fog!"

"And our bearings—see! our bearings are entirely different. We must have been driven away by the wind! We must have been drifting in some strong current!"

Bunnell did not reply, but stared into the bottom of the boat as if startled by some keen sense of peril.

"I thought I heard a gushing and splashing of water," he said, leaning forward and drawing a two-inch plug out of the bottom of the boat, unseen, of course, by his fair passenger. "Ah, it has sprung a leak! Will you bail out the water, Dorie, while I row for life?"

It was merely natural that Dorie experienced a great shock at these declarations.

But her undaunted nature asserted itself quickly, and she acted upon Bunnell's suggestion.

It was easy for the plotting suitor, however, to add rapidly to the leak by drawing out half a dozen more plugs like the first—the boat having been especially provided for this business—and to thus give an increase to the "leak" that was soon beyond Dorie's control.

"I see!" exclaimed Bunnell, with well simulated terror. "We shall not be able to escape by rowing!"

"Must we drown, then?" cried Dorie.

"Not necessarily. I know where we are. There is an island near at hand. With the aid of the oars we shall be able to reach it, if you will be calm and not hamper me."

The boat was now half-full of water—so swamped beneath its load that Bunnell ceased to make any further effort at escape with the oars.

"We must swim for it," he said, as he threw himself into the water, crossing the oars in front of him. "Do not fear. I can readily support us both, if you will resign yourself wholly to my care and guidance."

"Oh, we shall drown!" cried Dorie, as the boat disappeared beneath her, plunging her into the water. "How cold it is! How terrible!"

"Do not be alarmed!" returned Bunnell, with the calmness of an automaton. "I am sure to save you! Be calm and hopeful!"

Supporting the maiden with one arm, he pushed his oars before him with the other, and struck out vigorously with his feet, promptly demonstrating to Dorie that he was able to keep her afloat and make fair progress over the waters.

Yet, what a plight she was in!

Her heart almost sunk within her.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO BE FOUND WHEN WANTED.

THE peril to which we left Dorie Ames and Rufus Bunnell was not so great as the maiden supposed.

Rufus knew just where he was. He had rowed abreast of one of those little islets, outlying the Beavers, which are scarcely more than heaps of sand crowned with low bushes. It was uninhabited of course, having scanty resources for an occupant, and lying at such a distance from all association with society that few persons could have been found to pass even a night upon it.

Among these few was Rufus.

On one occasion, finding himself a fugitive from justice, he had spent a whole summer at this spot, relieving the monotony of his life there by several trips to the mainland.

As a result of that prolonged residence, there was a small hut on the island, a spring of pure water, and a cache of provisions, which was composed principally of pilot bread and salt beef and pork, with butter, meal, flour and other articles of minor importance.

The hut itself was in the center of a wooded depression in the interior of the islet, so that only its roof was visible to any one sailing past, and even this small portion of the edifice was visible from only two or three points.

The reader will readily divine the plan Rufus Bunnell had formed.

The islet being at least eight miles from Mapleton Island, and at nearly this distance from the usual route of all craft passing up and down the lake, it offered a place of captivity for Dorie that could not be equaled elsewhere, short of going to the lonely rocks which skirt here and there the shores of the Upper Peninsula.

This idea of abducting the girl having been duly formed, Bunnell had set about its execution with a cunning worthy of a more capable villain.

He was too crafty to show his intentions clearly or fully.

All violence was discarded as unnecessary.

What he sought to accomplish was to give an appearance of simple accident to the whole proceeding.

And how well he had succeeded!

Dorie did not even suspect that he had deep and dark designs upon her.

She believed the boat had really sprung a leak, as much to Bunnell's surprise as to her own.

Once assured that he could support her in the water, and at the same time make considerable

progress in any desired direction, with the support afforded by the oars, she dismissed her first wild apprehensions, and sought to realize his assurance that he would save her.

"There is hope for us, Rufus?" she murmured, her teeth almost chattering with the chill given her by the cold waters.

"As much as if we were already ashore," was the answer. "I am perfectly certain that we are near an island!"

So certain that he felt anew for the bottom, and this time he found it.

This bottom shoaling rapidly, he was soon upon a low, sandy shore, carrying Dorie out of the water, as much to her surprise as to her joy.

"Saved!" was her joyous cry. "We'll raise a signal of distress in the morning, and can hardly fail to be taken off by some passing ship in the course of the day!"

Rufus Bunnell assented, but with a very hypocritical and treacherous countenance.

In the first place, he did not intend to raise any signal of distress.

In the second place he had lived upon the islet nearly six months without seeing a human being come near it!

He accordingly regarded the rescue of the maiden as the problem of a distant future.

"Does any one live here?" pursued Dorie.

"No one," was the answer.

The couple came to a halt, looking searchingly around, and Dorie improved this opportunity of wringing the water from her skirts and dress.

"Yes, I know the spot," resumed Bunnell. "This way, please!"

He moved toward the interior.

"What is there in that direction?" asked the maiden, inspired with apprehension by the patch of forest looming vaguely up before her.

"The hut of a hermit who used to live here!" explained Bunnell. "I dare say it will afford us all necessary shelter until morning!"

The girl made a grimace of repugnance, experiencing a keen regret that she had trusted herself in Bunnell's company, but she followed him without remark, and in a few moments found herself at the hut.

She was not a little surprised to see how Bunnell found his way into it, and how promptly he lighted a candle and kindled a fire, with the aid of some matches which were evidently none the worse for wetting.

To her surprise, there was found in a closet a quantity of feminine wearing apparel, including dresses, all clean and new, which Bunnell suggested had been washed ashore during the residence of the hermit, and were of course quite at her disposal, if she cared to rid herself of her damp and clinging garments.

"While you are thus employed," he said, "I will make an effort to recover our boat. It will continue to float, even if full of water, and I hope the wind and current have brought it ashore near where we landed!"

Expressing his intention of returning to her within half an hour, he hastily withdrew.

Returning to the beach, he waded out into the little bay at the mouth of which the boat had so suddenly become unseaworthy.

It is almost needless to say that he was not ten seconds in finding his craft—a success he had rendered all the more certain by dropping his anchor unseen over the side just a moment before abandoning it.

To raise the anchor and take the boat ashore was the work of a few seconds.

Then he rid it of all the water it contained, and carefully plugged up the holes with the plugs he had previously fitted to them.

In short, within five minutes after he set about the recovery of the boat, it was as fit for use as ever.

It was merely damp from the wetting it had received.

"As sound and tight as a drum again," he muttered, as he pushed off the boat and made it fast to the shore. "If I do not get back to Mapleton Island sooner than we made the trip hither, I shall be greatly mistaken."

He brought from the concealment of some adjacent bushes a mast, with a sail, which he proceeded to step, and he then took possession of the boat, pushing off, and laying his course toward Mapleton Island.

"A dangerous and disagreeable trip," he muttered, as he unfurled his sail and drew aft his sheet, seating himself in the stern. "But nothing worth having is to be had in this world without taking some risk. I'll be back before morning, with whatever story it may be pleasant or profitable to tell. In the mean time, Dorie is safe. She's where she can be found when wanted!"

The reflection seemed to give him great joy, and it was with a smiling and sinister jubilation that he pursued his voyage as rapidly as favoring winds and currents would let him.

He was getting on in his projects!

The ward of the "Lord of the Isle" was in his hands and at his mercy!

He cared little that the girl had already rejected him, and did not love him; he thought he saw his way to the removal of this difference of views and opinions.

He was not at all troubled by the fact that

the Lord of the Isle had forbidden him to remain on the island or to return to it.

This also was a matter he felt confident to handle to at least his own satisfaction.

In a word, Rufus Bunnell was quite a competent rascal, and he had well laid his plans!

He already considered himself, in all that concerned his wooing, the master of the situation!

CHAPTER IX.

NEAR THE SCENE OF ACTION.

"WELL, we're getting on, Wally."

Such was the greeting of Chief Gibson, as he emerged from the cabin of his steam yacht, some twenty-four hours after leaving Chicago.

The handsome features of Walter March brightened and his eyes sparkled with pleasure, for the tone of his chief showed that the young pilot's devotion to duty was being duly appreciated.

"I am very glad you are satisfied, sir," he responded, "and only hope we shall continue to be favored. But I see already that the day will not end as it began—with warmth and sunshine, but with a fog and a chill."

"You think so?"

"I know this region, sir, and what to expect at this season of the year," explained Wally.

"As clear as the sky still is, we shall have heavy weather by morning, and it will set in with one of the fogs characteristic of the season!"

The remark seemed to touch the chief of police closely, for his brow clouded.

"I shall be sorry if it is a bad night," he declared, "for by nightfall we shall be at the scene of our labors. Thus far you have seen nothing that looks suggestive of wreckers?"

"Nothing whatever, sir. But I am sure we shall see them or hear of them before morning. This is to be one of their nights of activity, or I am no prophet. They seldom act in fine weather, or when the sky is clear, but always in the edge of a storm, or the depths of a fog!"

"I'm glad you are alive to the danger of our enterprise, Wally," said Colonel Gibson. "It would be awkward enough if, going out to shear, we should go home shorn! Such a fact would not read well in our obituaries, to say nothing of the official pigeon-holes of the Police Department. Have you talked much to young Mapleton to-day?"

"A great deal, sir," answered Wally, and I am ready to stake my life on his honor and honesty. He has been away three years, chiefly in Germany. Finding himself so near home, he is naturally talkative. Besides, boys will be boys, you know, when thrown together in this way," and Wally smiled significantly. "He has told me all about himself, with such good faith and candor—I may even say such friendly confidence—that I can have no possible suspicion of him. He is going home to marry a charming girl named Dorie Ames, his father's ward, who has been brought up with him. He has shown me her picture, and even invited me to pay him a visit at Mapleton Island!"

The chief of police expressed his pleasure at these communications.

They amply confirmed his first impressions of the young passenger.

"I saw you were busy with him," he said, "and thought you'd find out more about him than all the rest of us could. Boys will be frank with boys, as you suggest. Have you noticed," he added, abruptly, sending a long glance at a three-masted schooner ahead, "whether we are gaining on that vessel?"

"We're gaining, but not rapidly," was the reply, "and it will be a long time before we can come up with her, so long as she has such a breeze and course as now favor her. She is the Harbinger, one of the fastest schooners upon the lakes!"

"Ah, the Harbinger! She sailed just ahead of us?"

"Or, rather, about eight o'clock in the morning."

The young pilot reflected a few moments, and then sighed deeply.

"I wish there were some way of communicating with her," he declared.

"What would you say?"

"I'd like her officers to take notice that they will be near Mapleton Island at dark, and that it is such a day and evening, as the wreckers will be likely to choose for another of their exploits. But it will be impossible to give them a hint of this nature. We shall not overhaul them in time."

Chief Gibson leaned forward and bent a long glance at the vessel in question.

She was still almost hull-down, and consequently could not have been less than eight or ten miles distant.

All her sails had been spread.

Having the wind on the port quarter, she was making fine progress, especially as she possessed a rare model, and had been designed for speedy transits between the upper lakes and the head of the St. Lawrence.

"We shall be near her by night," pursued Wally, "but not near enough to communicate with her, as we are not supplied with flags and codes for that purpose. Let us hope that her commander will be alive to the situation!"

"He certainly ought to be," returned Chief

Gibson. "Enough has been said about these false lights and the fiendish gang of wreckers they represent. No one, it would seem, can be ignorant of the terrible wrecks which have already been caused by them."

"True, sir," assented Wally, "but many of our captains and pilots make light of all they hear on this subject, and venture to proceed on the assumption that they will escape, even if all the rest of mankind perish."

"Only too true, Wally. It is not too much to say that one-half of our shipwrecks are caused by the heedlessness of captains to the warnings which have come to their knowledge."

"I fear such is the case, sir. If you will excuse me now, Colonel Gibson, I will take my dinner."

"Certainly, my boy."

"The fact is, sir," and the youth's handsome face flushed again, as his keen glance swept the sky and the surface of the lake in one survey. "It is the last bite I shall have in all probability till morning. I am going to give all my time and attention to the work before us."

He nodded adieu, and vanished below.

"Good! he's always the same in thoughtfulness and prevision," muttered the chief of police looking after him. "Whatever may be the cleverness of the wreckers, they'll have to be astir early to get the better of Wally March!"

The young pilot was soon on deck again, taking his place amidships, and from that moment gave all his attention to business.

In good truth, the steamer was now entering upon one of the most difficult pieces of navigation presented by the lakes—a region where numerous islands and shoals obstruct the route to such an extent that they can be passed only by tortuous and winding channels.

Remaining fixedly at his post, Wally watched the dull mirrors of the sea and sky, with the various specks upon them, not forgetting the three-masted schooner, to which the steam-yacht advanced nearer and nearer.

Thus wore away the long afternoon.

As the young pilot had foreseen, the day closed with a mist which he knew would quickly deepen into a dense and dangerous fog and by the time the light on Mapleton Island met his gaze, all his provisions in regard to the weather had been realized.

A heavy fog was closing in.

It is just the night for the wreckers," he said to the chief of police, who suddenly appeared at his side. "And that big schooner ahead of us is sure to tempt them."

"If so, we shall know it," returned Chief Gibson. "We have almost overhauled her. She's not a mile from us, and we seem to be gaining more rapidly than at any time since our departure."

"Yes, sir, because there is less wind. We shall soon be up with her."

The conversation was dropped here, the young pilot and his chief becoming unusually serious.

They knew that they were nearing a critical moment. The shadows in the air were already of the grimmest and murkiest description. Wild gusts of wind swept the surface of the lake. The lights in the neighborhood—including that on Mapleton Island—began to look vague and indistinct, as if shining through a lantern of horn.

Any one of them might be blotted out of the scene at any moment by a bank of fog rolling in upon it.

In such a state of affairs as this, what a field was open for the villainous activity of the wreckers!

CHAPTER X.

THE DOOMED VESSEL.

On sped the three-masted schooner, with all her sails still flung to the breeze, and on sped the little steamer behind her, rapidly lessening the distance between them.

The light on Mapleton Island, like a great fiery eye, was steadily guiding their movements.

The night had soon fully set in, and its darkness was doubled by an intense fog, as related.

As fixed as a statue, steadying himself in the center of the deck a little aft of the main hatch, Wally gave all his attention to his duties.

A few yards behind him stood Chief Gibson, his soul quite as much absorbed in the scene around him as was that of the young pilot.

He had taken this situation in order to give the youth any necessary advice and assistance.

"All is still going well, Wally," he at length remarked.

"Yes, sir. But we may soon see a change for the worse. We are nearing the island. How the real light can be changed for a false one, is a mystery I have never been able to fathom; but it's clear enough that none of the ordinary arts of the wreckers would suffice for that purpose."

"Certainly not," confirmed the chief. "I see you have placed a lantern at the heel of the bowsprit, just under the bulwarks. What is your object?"

"Simply to keep myself informed from mo-

ment to moment, of the exact bearing of the real light!"

"I see! A sort of triangulation!"

"Exactly, sir. With myself in one angle, and the light and lantern in the two others—so to speak—it will be impossible for the wreckers to mix up my bearings promptly enough for me to mistake the false light for the real one!"

Chief Gibson smiled approvingly.

"I should never have thought of that expedient," he declared. "Yet I can comprehend in a moment how effective it is likely to be. You think that the action of the wreckers then—if they act at all—will be about what you stated this morning?"

"That's the idea, sir. They must suddenly extinguish the real light just a moment before they produce the false one, as we should have two lights under our eyes at the same instant."

The chief nodded understandingly.

"Just how this substitution is accomplished is a secret to be discovered. It is easy enough to see, however, that it can only be accomplished by signals through the agency of light. What I intend to do is to keep my eye on the real light—that of Mapleton Island—and under no circumstances to exchange that bearing—even if the light vanishes—for one taken from the Flying Glim of the wreckers!"

A brief silence succeeded, the couple regarding fixedly the light in question.

The plans of the young pilot had been cleverly formed.

It was indeed a sort of triangulation he had laid himself out to accomplish with the aid of his lantern at the bow.

If he could carry out his work as he had conceived it, he was sure to be more than a match for the wreckers.

"We shall be under the stern of the schooner in a few minutes more," rejoined Wally, "and I will give the captain a warning, if possible. As you see, sir, I have instructed the engineers to avoid all noise, and for an hour past we have been moving like a phantom. It is doubtful if we have made noise enough to betray our presence. We show no signs of a light, and hence—"

He interrupted himself abruptly.

His eyes fixed upon the light of Mapleton Island, he had seen it eclipsed some twelve degrees to the right of the course he was steering, and had seen it almost immediately reappear at least five points to the left of his bow!

He saw all at a glance.

The real light upon Mapleton Island had been suddenly extinguished, and a false light of the same character had appeared on the Patsey Reef, three miles to the westward.

With bounds like those of a tiger, the young pilot traversed the space intervening between him and the wheel.

"Port!" he shouted, taking new bearings with the aid of his lantern at the bow. "The real light has been extinguished! What you see is the false light. Do not steer by it, but hold the yacht to her present course!"

The order was obeyed.

Very gradually but surely the forward motion of the yacht caused the bearing of the false light to creep from the heel of the bowsprit to the verge of the quarter.

In other terms, Wally continued to follow precisely the course he would have taken if the light of Mapleton Island had continued to favor him with its guidance.

At the end of a few moments the commander of the steamer joined him.

"Are you sure you're right, Wally?" he demanded anxiously. "You seem to me to be running upon the Outer Patsey."

"No, sir. We shall clear the island and go on our way safely."

"In that case, what is to become of the 'Harbinger'?"

For the moment, in his excitement, as well as in the extreme tension of mind caused by the rescue of his own ship, the young pilot had lost sight of the endangered schooner.

"As you see," pursued the commander, "she is leaving us. Her attention is fixed upon the false light!"

"What a pity! How unfortunate!"

The young pilot wrung his hands in anguish. "What can we do?" he cried. "She's going to her doom, for that light is the Flying Glim. She's heading directly upon the end of the island!"

"Sure?" asked the commander.

"As sure as that I live," answered Wally. "What can we do?"

As he repeated this involuntary cry, he swung a lantern energetically to and fro, uttering loud cries of warning and appeal, but he might as well have addressed the wind or the sea; no notice was taken of him.

Heard he was, to be sure, but the officer of the watch was listening to a side-splitting yarn that one of the passengers, seated amidships, was telling to several fellow-passengers, and took no notice of these excited signals.

"Port!" suddenly exclaimed Wally, as he desisted from his vain attempt to save the schooner, and again gave all his attention to his own vessel.

"Port it is, sir!" responded the man at the wheel.

For a few moments the yacht responded to her helm, until she was moving in the desired direction, and then the young pilot added:

"Steady!"

"Steady it is, sir!"

For a long time—it seemed an age—the two vessels continued to dash on, the divergence of their courses becoming every moment wider and wider.

"Are you sure, Wally?" again asked the commander, pausing in his feverish walk back and forth, which sufficiently attested his anxiety.

The young pilot again answered in the affirmative.

"Starboard!" he then shouted.

Once more the bow of the yacht swung in the desired direction during a few brief instants.

"Steady!" then cried the young pilot.

The order was obeyed.

By this time, owing to the course the yacht had taken, the false light was bearing directly abeam on the port side.

This is as much as to say that the schooner, having guided itself by the false light, was near the end of the Outer Beaver.

Suddenly there arose such a wild chorus of cries from the deck of the schooner that they reached the hearing of Wally and his companions.

The peril had been discovered.

But too late!

A loud crash resounded, as the doomed craft plunged headlong upon the island with such force as to tear all the masts out of her, and then came an appalling silence.

And at that very moment, the false light vanishing, the real light—that of Mapleton Island—shone out again in all its clearness, and a single glance told all aboard the steamer that they were in the right position in respect to its bearings, and that they were safe!

CHAPTER XI.

DORIE'S SECRET ADMIRER.

UPON the lawn near the entrance of the Mapleton Villa, Peter Mapleton, the unworthy brother of the Lord of the Isle, was walking rapidly to and fro, his wild eyes wandering uneasily in every direction around him.

"It's done!" he muttered. "The real light is again shining. Another ship has been dashed in pieces. And yet—"

The words seemed to stick in his throat.

His voice was singularly expressive of emotion; surprise, annoyance, and pain all blending therein, as well as in his every glance and action.

"And yet I cannot go to the Outer Beaver to see what has been accomplished," he resumed. "My blood seems on fire! Where can Dorie have gone?"

Rapid footsteps startled him, and he hastened to conceal himself in a clump of bushes.

A human figure came into view from the villa—passed him—and vanished into the shadows in the direction of the light-house.

This figure was that of the Lord of the Isle.

Strange was the aspect the two presented.

It would have been difficult to tell one from the other.

One might even have been mistaken for some strange shadow of the other.

Remaining concealed until his brother had vanished, Peter Mapleton stepped forth abruptly, glancing alternately in the direction of the villa and in the direction the Lord of the Isle had gone.

How excited he seemed!

"I must look through the house again!" he ejaculated, as resolute of mien as of voice. "She must certainly have left it, or else I should have seen her. Fortunately the absence of my brother from the villa enables me to verify the matter. Yes, I'll look again!"

He boldly entered the villa, and began taking his way through its principal apartments, but with an air which showed how keenly he deemed himself an intruder.

"Of course I will be cautious," was his thought. "But if I am seen I can only be mistaken for Harmon! No one will venture to suppose I am that helpless cripple and paralytic!"

It was with the utmost care that he explored the apartments of Dorie Ames, only to find that they did not afford the least trace of her whereabouts.

The sinister excitement of the unworthy brother deepened.

His eyes grew wilder and more feverish in their glances.

A flood of perspiration appeared on his forehead.

Again he whispered hollowly:

"Where can she be?"

There was not so much as an echo or a footfall to answer him.

The only certainty was that she had left the dwelling.

"Can she have made some supposed dreadful discovery, and fled through some sentiment of horror?" he muttered. "Can Paul have returned home already and carried her off? Or has she fallen into the hands of some rustic admirer like that Rufus Bunnell? Where can she be? What can have happened?"

He resumed his feverish quest through the

villa, and soon prevented himself at the door of the housekeeper's room, finding that lady reclining drowsily upon a lounge before a fire she had kindled for company.

"Have you seen Dorie this evening, Mrs. Mansion?" asked the disguised brother, assuming to a nicety the voice of the Lord of the Isle and keeping his face in the shadow.

"She went out before dark, sir, and I have not seen her since. Is she not in her rooms?"

Peter Mapleton shook his head.

"That is very strange," declared the housekeeper, gaining her feet. "Let me look for her!"

The house was thoroughly explored by the housekeeper, but the measure only led to the conviction that Dorie was not in it.

Taking his way out of doors, Peter Mapleton dashed to and fro like a madman, exploring every haunt where he had ever seen Dorie, but in vain.

He found no trace of her.

The excitement which rapidly took possession of him was of the most intense description.

"Fool that I am!" he ejaculated, as he finally came to a halt upon a crest not far from his cottage. "I should have made sure of her yesterday, or this afternoon! If I had her here at this moment, I should be completely triumphant. I have secured my brother's bonds and stocks. I have raised a pile of money by putting a mortgage upon the island in his name. Oh, if Dorie were only here now! Better to have lost all else than to lose her!"

Any one hearing these remarks would have quickly comprehended the situation.

Peter Mapleton was madly in love with Dorie.

He had long been secretly her lover without avowing his sentiments to her or to any one else.

He had taken good care to keep his wife ignorant of this passion.

He knew her well enough to know that she would never forgive him, if the truth were to come to her ears.

He had accordingly loved and toiled in secret, looking to some future day of triumph, which was sure to come sooner or later, for an opportunity of taking the fate of the girl into his keeping.

The hour for this task seemed to have come—but Dorie was missing!

Clearly enough, in falling into the Scylla planned by Rufus Bunnell, she had avoided the more serious Charybdis plotted by Peter Mapleton.

How he raved and cursed at this realization of the maiden's absence!

He was in danger of betraying himself, of ignoring his usual precautions, in the intensity of his despair.

CHAPTER XII.

PAUL MAPLETON AND HIS UNCLE.

THE triumph of Wally March had been complete.

By his thoughtfulness, cleverness and capacity, he had rescued the little steamer from her perils, while one of the oldest and most popular pilots of the lakes had carried the three-master to her doom.

The sigh of relief that escaped him after the severe tension of the preceding hour can be imagined.

"You see that I was right, Captain Bush," he exclaimed, as he waved his hand toward the real light.

"I do, indeed! A thousand thanks!" was the grateful answer.

While these brief remarks were being uttered, Chief Gibson had been looking into the darkness where the schooner had vanished.

Having been able to note her whereabouts by her lights, he was equally able to judge from their disappearance what had happened.

The three-master had crumbled like an egg-shell hurled against a rock.

At the rate of speed at which she had been going, having the wind and current in her favor, she was opened from stem to stern by the wedge of rocks upon which she had been driven, and went to pieces almost as readily as if she had been built of glass.

"There is no doubt that she is dashed in pieces," declared Chief Gibson.

"No, sir," affirmed the young pilot.

"And her crew, Wally! We must fly to their assistance!"

"I have already thought of that," answered the young pilot. "I am waiting only for sea-room to go about. Just now we are abreast of the end of the island, where the channel is narrow and the current exceptionally rapid. In a few moments, sir!"

He gave two or three orders in rapid succession to the man at the wheel, and then resumed:

"Fortunately I know these shores and waters as well as I know my fingers. I could take the yacht around the east end of the shoal, and up the false channel behind it, which is deep enough for us, but it would take too long. If you please, Captain Bush, we'll go about and anchor the steamer in the little cove just inside of Black Point. This will be a good situation from which to land on the island."

"Certainly, Wally," returned Captain Bush. "The matter is entirely in your hands!"

The youth proceeded to execute the task devolving upon him, guiding himself by the light of the island to the sort of anchorage he had mentioned.

"We must be on our guard," he said to the chief of police, when he had dropped anchor. "We are now liable to encounter the wreckers at any moment!"

"I'll bring up our arms," returned the chief. "Since we are in a fair way to surprise them at their fiendish work, we must be ready for desperate battle."

He hastened into the cabin, whence he soon returned, followed by young Mapleton.

Both were loaded with revolvers, which were promptly distributed to the officers and crew of the yacht.

The face of Paul Mapleton, as revealed by Wally's lantern, was deathly pale, and he looked as if the events of the evening had added years to his age.

"You know all, I suppose?" said Captain Bush, as kindly as possible.

"All, sir," and the voice of the young passenger was like a wail. "These things stab me to the heart! To think that such crimes can be committed at Mapleton Island is simply horrible!"

In the mean time, the crew of the yacht had been as busy as bees, and a boat was already in the water.

"Of course some of us must remain aboard," said Captain Bush, "or the wreckers will come there and plunder or destroy the steamer. Another thing, three or four of us will be enough for the boat!"

The choice was quickly made; a number of lanterns lighted; the members of the little expedition armed themselves; and then they all took their places in the boat.

"You must still be our pilot, of course!" suggested Chief Gibson, addressing Wally. "You had better take your place at the tiller."

The young pilot assented, and the boat pulled rapidly away.

"There's a little creek not far to the left of the light-house," observed Wally, after a brief silence. "I have often been there, and on more than one occasion when it was as dark as it is now. I can readily find the spot. Not too fast, however. As little noise as possible. No doubt the plunderers are astir and we must try to surprise them!"

The boat went on quietly two or three hundred yards, and was then headed a little more in the direction of the light.

Another space of similar length was traversed under the new bearings, and then Wally made a suggestion of caution.

"Don't you see the creek, Mr. Mapleton?" he asked, the young passenger, in his eagerness to get ashore, having placed himself in the bow of the boat.

"Yes, a little more to the right, eight or ten points," was the answer, in a guarded tone.

"Ah, I see it."

The boat resumed progress, Wally steering it into the creek.

"Singular! there's a boat ahead of us, and a man in it," suddenly communicated young Mapleton, in the same tone as before. "It probably belongs to the wreckers."

This suggestion was enough.

The boat of the investigators was impelled rapidly to the land, placing itself beside the one which had preceded it.

Curiously enough, the man in charge of the latter did not move.

He had heard the name of Mapleton, as spoken by Wally, when addressing the young passenger, and had taken it for granted that the newcomers were of the same complexion as himself.

To take him prisoner was the work of a moment, after the new-comers had once reached his side, and in another instant he was gagged and bound, despite all his protestations of belonging to the same fraternity as themselves.

"I see how the case stands," observed Chief Gibson. "The fellow has been left here to guard the boat, while his comrades are busy at the scene of disaster. Let us leave a man on guard over the two boats and the prisoner and hurry to the scene of the wreck on the Outer Beaver."

"While you are thus engaged," proposed Paul Mapleton, "I'll hurry home. I am anxious to see my father as soon as possible!"

"All right," returned Chief Gibson. "Come back to us later."

Paul hastened away, taking the shortest route to the villa.

He had barely got clear of his late companions, when he encountered a man who was hurrying in the direction from which the youth had come.

This man was Peter Mapleton.

"Father!" cried Paul excitedly, a sudden flash from the revolving light revealing the youth's features.

"Ah, is it you, Paul?" was the response of the unworthy brother.

"As you see, father!" cried Paul. "How glad I am to see you again!"

And with this he threw himself into the arms

of his supposed parent, little suspecting that he was being deceived by a clever disguise, and that he was caressing the pretended paralytic!

CHAPTER XIII.

A PRETENDED CONFESSION.

RECOILING from the embraces thus proffered him, and shrinking from such close contact with his sharp-eyed nephew, Peter Mapleton turned his back to the light streaming upon him from the light-house, and said:

"It is strange that you should arrive here at such a moment, my son!"

"Why strange, sir?"

"You meet me just as I am hurrying to the beach to drown myself!"

"Drown yourself?"

It was the youth's turn to recoil.

He could not have been more astounded if he had received a violent blow.

"Yes, Paul. Your father is unfit to live. Since you went away to Europe, I have become one of the worst criminals of this or any other age!"

"Father!" protested Paul, his whole aspect bristling with horror, his face deathly pale.

"It is only too true," declared Peter Mapleton, "and you will soon be overwhelmed with the revelations and discoveries which concern me!"

"Impossible, father!" cried Paul, still more earnestly. "You were always and ever the soul of honor. It cannot be that you have changed so terribly and quickly. What have you done? Of what are you accused?"

"Hear me, Paul," resumed the impostor, with well-simulated remorse and agitation. "It is better that you should hear the story of my guilt from my own lips than from the daily papers or the authorities. I have descended from the proud position of other days, and have become the most wicked and degraded of men. In a word, I am the head and arm of that terrible band of wreckers who are responsible for all the false lights which have been shown in and around these islands during your absence in Europe!"

"No, no, father! Impossible!" cried Paul, his form shaking with mingled grief and horror. "This is some strange hallucination! Wealthy, honored, and noble-hearted, how could you have descended to such wickedness?"

"It was the want of money that caused my downfall," said Peter Mapleton, by way of explanation. "Soon after you left, I became fearfully embarrassed. I need not go into details. They would only deepen my humiliation and shame, and add to your pain and disgust. Suffice it to say that I learned a great deal from my poor, afflicted brother, about false lights and wreckers, he having become familiar with many of the stirring histories which have been enacted upon the reefs of Florida, and I was weak enough to catch at this idea as the means of filling my pocket with money."

Paul gasped for breath, unable to utter a word.

The pretended confession was evidently having its due effect upon him.

"I need not say how horribly I was mistaken in this attempt to 'raise the wind,' Paul," pursued Peter Mapleton, as whiningly as before. "I got little or nothing, after sharing with the men I was forced to take into my confidence, or who assisted me in these operations. Instead of lessening my embarrassments, I added to them. I was soon actually in need!"

"And yet you have never written me one word concerning these embarrassments during all the time I have been in Europe! To the contrary, your language has always been that of a man who is at his ease financially. Why didn't you write me about these troubles?"

"To what end, Paul—to what end? You couldn't have helped me!"

"Yes, I could! I could have come home and taken off my coat and gone to work in the fields, if only to save for your use the liberal remittances you have made to me. Oh, father! father! why were you not frank with me? I would at least have prevented you from taking any part in these horrible crimes!"

The impostor groaned, with pretended anguish.

"It is too late now to ask why I did not do differently," he declared. "For three years I have been engaged in wrecking ships for what I could get from them. How many lives have been lost, I am not prepared to say, but you will be startled at the reports which will be brought to your notice. And yet all these crimes were useless. They did not improve my condition financially. And at last I was forced to put a mortgage upon the island which now threatens to take it away from our family forever!"

"Let it go, father! I shall never live here, after what has happened!"

"And even the mortgage has not helped me," resumed Peter Mapleton. "All that money has slipped through my fingers. The various desperate measures it took to recover my lost footing all turned out badly. To-day I am a beggar, as well as an assassin! I blurt out these facts, Paul, because I expect the officers of the law here from one moment to another to arrest me! The only choice I now have is to die by my own hand or upon the gallows!"

Paul Mapleton stood as if stunned, no longer

attempting to repudiate the assertions of the man before him.

In good truth, he was forced to acknowledge to himself that they were terribly in harmony with the fears and forebodings which had assailed him ever since his departure from Chicago.

He comprehended clearly enough that the suspicions of Chief Gibson had become concentrated very strongly upon the Lord of the Isle.

In a word, he could no longer refuse to accept as the truth all the impostor was saying.

"And Dorie, father?" he cried. "Does she know anything of the suspicions of which you are the object? Has she any knowledge of the crimes of which you have been guilty?"

"Yes, Paul, I am sorry to say," was the answer. "The truth has at last come home to her. Within an hour or two—or in the course of this very evening—she has learned to see me as I am, in all the hideousness of my guilt."

"Poor Dorie!" asped Paul. "The discovery will kill her! She can never survive the shock of hearing what you have avowed to me. My poor dove! Where is she?"

"Heaven only knows, Paul! She has disappeared from the house and the surrounding grounds! I fear she is no longer on the island. Doubtless she has flung herself in the lake, in an awful convulsion of anguish and despair!"

Again Paul stood as if petrified, only his short gasping breath attesting that he still lived.

"Then I shall die, too," he said hollowly, as he turned away. "Oh, pitying heaven!"

Language is powerless to describe the awful anguish and desolation he experienced at that moment.

But a gleam of light came.

"Dorie is not a girl to kill herself," he declared, with the earnestness of a profound conviction. "She is merely hiding her grief in some nook of the house or in some retreat among the rocks and groves. I will search for her and find her. Poor Dorie!"

"If you find her," said Peter Mapleton, "bring her to the villa. Just what course I shall take to avoid the consequences of my guilt need not now be discussed or decided. For the present I leave you, Paul. I humbly ask your forgiveness for having betrayed your trust and affection so shamefully. Possibly I may come back to the house in a few minutes, with a resolve to face it out. Life is still dear to me, and of course you are not forced to breathe the least hint to any one of my terrible confession. When I see you again, I shall meet you precisely as if this interview had not taken place. I may conclude to defy the authorities to prove that I am guilty. For the moment, adieu!"

And Peter Mapleton walked rapidly away, without a glance behind him, promptly disappearing from the view of his nephew.

"He believes me to be his father of course," said the miscreant to himself, with a chuckle like that of a fiend. "He will never doubt the guilt of his parent, after the assertions I have just made. He will never do me to pass a single day upon the island. And thus I get rid of both father and son. Ha, ha! I'm getting on finely! All I have now to do is to get back to my bed and resume my role of paralytic—an agreeable change, after the lively events and movements of the last hour or two. All I have to do now is to await the natural sequence of events and be prepared to reap with quiet dignity my coming harvest, as the next Lord of the Isle!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PAUL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE grief of Paul Mapleton, at the declarations of his wicked uncle, was simply beyond expression.

For a few moments he stood as if petrified, with his soul in such a convulsion that he must have lost his reason or his life, if there had been no way out of the dreadful torment into which he had been plunged.

But such was not to be his fate.

He rallied nobly, showing himself true to the respect and affection he had so long borne his surviving parent.

"Impossible!" burst from him.

It was indeed impossible that his father should have been guilty of such conduct as had been so glibly imputed to him.

It was absolutely impossible that the man Paul had encountered should be the Lord of the Isle!

A thousand times impossible!

"That man can only be some infamous impostor!" pursued the young hero with a start of joy and relief. "But who? He can only be some one who knew of my expected return. Ah! I have it! He can be no other than my uncle Peter!"

The thought came to him with all the force of a conviction, producing a profound revulsion in his feelings.

The wild look vanished from his eyes, and the pallor of anguish upon his features gave place to a warm flush of delight.

He breathed again naturally.

He remembered the character of his uncle only too well, notwithstanding his long absence in Europe.

To realize that Peter Mapleton was capable of the worst crimes was for him as simple as to add two and two together.

How like a flash of light was that thought!

"Yes," he said to himself, "that man was my worthless uncle! Would that I had realized the fact sooner. I would have soon dragged him to the light and exposed his wickedness and imposture. I see how it is. He has recovered his health and strength, but still pretends to be a paralytic! He still leaves everybody to suppose that he is bed-ridden. Ten to one, if I am prompt to pay a visit to his cottage, I shall find that he is not there!"

The thought was too important not to be acted upon with the utmost celerity.

Even as he reached the conclusion we have indicated, he turned his steps rapidly in the direction of his uncle's cottage, and it was without the least pause or delay that he held to this course until he had reached his destination.

His first thought, on reaching the cottage, was of a dog which had formerly been a great favorite with his aunt, but he was not long in discovering that the kennel which had been appropriated to this animal was now empty.

A brief survey of the premises told Paul that unwonted and elaborate pains had been taken to keep out all intruders.

"Hermetically sealed!" was the sarcasm to which he mentally gave utterance, after he had cautiously made the tour of the dwelling.

Every door was evidently secured with bolt and bar.

Every window duly fastened and curtained.

There was not the least nook or crevice by which even a mouse could have gained admittance.

All these circumstances seemed to Paul a full confirmation of his suspicions.

There was a light in one of the front lower rooms, but it was cut off at each window by thick and closely-fitting curtains, in such a way as to defy any one outside to observe what was going on within.

Something like a smile appeared on Paul's face as he noted these precautions.

He prepared to knock for admittance.

He had even raised his hand for this purpose, when a thoughtful discretion restrained him.

Why exchange a certainty for an uncertainty?

In other terms, why should he ask to be let into the house when he could give himself admittance?

More than once, in his boyish days, when the house was occupied by a chum of his own years, Paul had climbed the lightning-rod and gained the interior of the house through a scuttle in the roof.

Why not repeat that feat now?

In those days ago, he had possessed no higher motive for the feat in question than to elude the notice of his chum's parents.

Surely his present incentive to secrecy was far better.

Acting upon these reflections, he laid hold of the lightning rod and went up to the roof hand over hand with a rapidity worthy of a squirrel.

Another moment and he was at the scuttle in the roof.

He was surprised, after what he had seen below, to find the scuttle unfastened, but he did not hesitate an instant to avail himself of this circumstance, and in another moment he had gained the garret of the dwelling, closing the scuttle behind him.

There was just light enough in the apartment for him to see that it had undergone few or no changes since his last previous visit to it, and he lost no time in making his way down-stairs to the sitting-room, taking care to move with as much caution as could have been displayed by a burglar.

A single glance into the apartment where a light was burning was enough to tell him that his aunt, extended upon a lounge, had fallen into a sound slumber.

The bed in the corner showed that it had recently contained an occupant, but it was now empty.

A few further glances told Paul that his aunt was wholly alone in the dwelling.

"That's what I wanted to know," was our hero's mental comment. "Uncle Peter is not here."

Lighting a small lamp which stood upon the mantle-piece, he made a survey of the adjacent bedroom and pantry.

In the latter he found a dummy, which was evidently designed to represent his uncle, as it displayed a mask which had been modeled upon his features.

The discovery of this image added a great deal of certitude to the theories Paul had formed concerning the situation.

He understood from this moment the nature of the game his uncle was playing.

"The villain!" he mentally ejaculated, as he took his way up-stairs, after extinguishing the lamp and returning it to the mantle-piece. "Taking advantage of his resemblance to father, he has been doing here in father's name what he did long years ago in Florida! Fortunately, I have returned in time to assist Colonel Gibson in smoking him out. It only remains for me to

find father as soon as I can, and tell him what I have discovered."

Reaching the garret, he passed through the scuttle to the roof, and in another moment, availing himself of the lightning-rod, he had reached the ground in safety, and was hurrying as noiselessly as swiftly toward his father's dwelling.

Such joy as thrilled him at that moment he had never before experienced.

He realized that the discoveries he had just made might not only clear the name of his father from all the shadows which had gathered around it, but might even save him from a horrible and infamous death.

CHAPTER XV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

IT was with a strange sinking at his heart that the Lord of the Isle took his departure from the cottage occupied by his brother, as related in a former chapter.

For the first time in his life he found himself unable to resist the conviction that he was really and indisputably the victim of a horrible and even murderous machination.

Clearly enough, the wreckers had a leader, and that leader, as was also apparent, had disguised himself to figure as the Lord of the Isle.

This was the only possible explanation which could be given of the facts already developed.

Yet who could this man be?

"Evidently not Peter," was the thought of the wronged man. "God forgive me for entertaining for even a moment a sort of doubt or question concerning him! My poor brother!"

Absorbed in these reflections, the Lord of the Isle took his way quietly to the shore of a little bay near the south end of the island.

Here a small row-boat was lying aground, duly secured to a stake with a padlock.

Taking possession of this tiny craft, the Lord of the Isle pushed off as quietly as possible, and rowed away in silence.

His intention was to gain an offing from which he could survey his domain, and especially the light-house and the adjacent waters.

If any false light should be substituted for the real one, he believed that he would be able to detect the fact from a point a mile or two southwest of the lighthouse.

By the time he had rowed a mile, however, he realized that the weather was not favorable to his projects.

A low lying fog had covered the whole surface of the waters immediately around him, to such an extent that he could hardly make out the light upon the island.

At times it even vanished from his gaze.

As he started to return to the shore, he became conscious that a small steam craft of some kind was in motion near him, coming from the direction of Chicago.

The clank of an engine had become audible.

Yet he saw no light.

He was not long in realizing that he must be nearly in the path of the approaching craft, and he began rowing as rapidly as possible, in a direction at right angles with this supposed course.

He remarked at the same time that such a bank of fog had gathered around him that he could not see the length of his boat.

Nearer and nearer came the steam-yacht, with its clank of machinery, and the Lord of the Isle suddenly perceived that he had pulled directly in front of it.

Startled and bewildered, he made a desperate attempt to get out of the way, but in vain.

The next instant the yacht struck his boat, cutting it in two, and burying the fragments beneath its bow and keel.

The first measure of the Lord of the Isle had been to spring as far as possible from the moving cutwater, at the same time uttering a cry of alarm and appeal.

His second was to make an effort to clutch the bulwarks of the yacht.

Failing in his design, he was obliged to sink out of sight and beat a quick retreat to one side of the yacht, to keep out of the way of its screw.

When at length he came to the surface, and looked around and listened, the yacht had vanished from his view and almost from his hearing.

No attention was given to his cry.

It was in vain that he called again and again for assistance.

Not the least response was made to him.

Fortunately he was a good swimmer and had retained his hold of both of his oars.

As awkward and disagreeable as was his situation, he did not give way to any sentiment akin to apprehension for even a moment.

He realized that he had a long and difficult swim before him, and to that fact he gave all his attention.

His first measure was to get his eye upon the light of Mapleton Island, and his next to strike out leisurely in that direction, gaining all the support he could from the oars.

Once fairly at work, the chill he had experienced with his plunge into the water began to leave him.

With due attention to the winds and currents,

he soon saw that he was making some progress toward the shore.

But how slow it seemed!

And at the price of what exertions!

Again and again the light was intercepted by the fog resting upon the water, and on two or three of these occasions he found that he had gone quite a distance out of his course.

Yet he did not lose heart.

Not for an instant would he admit to himself that he was in any danger, or that the task he had undertaken could possibly prove too great for his strength.

Yet none the less might both of these predicates have been reasonably admitted.

The swim he had thought of accomplishing in a few minutes was duly continued more than an hour, and even then he found himself half as far from the shore as he had been at the moment of his encounter with the mysterious yacht.

But even this discovery did not cause him to falter or to relax his efforts.

He took it as a matter of course, continuing his way as calmly as ever.

As he had foreseen, the nearer he came to the shore, the less he had to apprehend from the winds and currents.

The nearer he was to his destination, too, the better he could direct his course by the light.

At length he arrived off the little bay where he had embarked, and here, as the fog suddenly lifted, he found himself within a few rods of a small steam-yacht, of graceful outlines, which lay at anchor.

Almost any other man than Harmon Mapleton would have utilized this discovery by calling for assistance and by swimming toward the yacht.

But the Lord of the Isle did neither.

He did not doubt that the yacht in question was the one by which he had been run down, and he was indignant that its occupants had so coolly left him to perish.

Another thing, he was now so near the shore that he felt quite able to complete the swim upon which he had so resolutely entered.

Without a word, therefore, without the least pause or hesitation, he took anew his bearings from the light, and pushed on to his destination with a new display of vigor.

As was natural, however, there was blood in his eye, as he bestowed a passing glance upon the silent vessel.

He said to himself that those aboard of her would hear from him before morning.

He even ventured to think that the yacht might be in some way associated with the machinations of which he was the victim.

Busy with these thoughts, the remainder of his swim was accomplished as easily as quickly, and in due course he reached the shore from which he had embarked two hours before.

How tired he was, how nearly exhausted, he did not even realize until his long suspense and struggle was followed by the inevitable reaction, and then he sunk helplessly to the ground, with the consciousness that he had had a narrow escape.

As was natural and inevitable, he devoted a few minutes to the recovery of his breath and strength, and then he arose and took his way toward his dwelling, which he reached in due course.

The amazement of his housekeeper, as she met him at the door, flashing the rays of a lamp upon his pale features and wet garments, will be readily comprehended.

"Why, where have you been?" was her greeting.

"I have been rowing," was his answer, as he entered the sitting-room, "and an unknown yacht has run me down, leaving me to perish. Where's Dorie?"

"Still absent, sir?"

"Absent, Mrs. Mansion?"

"Yes, sir! I have been looking everywhere, since you asked me where she was, half an hour ago, and can get no trace of her!"

The Lord of the Isle started, coming to a halt, his entire frame seeming to become rigid.

"Since I spoke to you, you say?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Half an hour ago?"

The woman nodded in a scared sort of way, her features whitening under the burning gaze fixed upon them.

"It's just half an hour since you were here—since you spoke to me!" she then gasped. "I—I looked at the clock!"

"Why, what do you mean, Mrs. Mansion?" queried the Lord of the Isle, as his own features became ghastly pale. "I have been absent more than two hours! Half an hour ago I was swimming for life far out in the lake! I have not exchanged a word with you this evening—not a word, Mrs. Mansion—about Dorie or any one else!"

"Then it was a ghost, sir!" protested the housekeeper, sinking into a chair and covering her face with her hands, while she burst into tears. "You came to that door, and you asked me where Dorie was. I not only recognized you, but recognized your voice!"

"And Dorie is missing, you say?"

"Yes, sir!"

Starting up in a surprise akin to terror, the Lord of the Isle seized a lamp and made a hasty survey of the premises, the housekeeper attending him, but it is needless to say that no trace was found of the missing girl.

"I see!" said the Lord of the Isle, in a hollow whisper, as he came back to the sitting-room. "The leader of those wreckers has been here in my absence! He came disguised to resemble me! He has even learned to imitate my voice! And evidently he has found means to entice Dorie away, or he has carried her off with him! What a horrible situation!"

Mrs. Mansion was too horrified to speak.

She could only sob and moan.

"Remain here," added the Lord of the Isle, with forced calmness. "I shall have a chill if I do not get out of these wet clothes."

Hastening to his own apartments, he changed his entire wearing apparel as promptly as he could, and then took his way back to Mrs. Mansion's presence.

"Did you see distinctly the man you took to be me, Mrs. Mansion?" he demanded.

"No, I did not," was the answer. "It struck me at the time as singular that he kept his face averted, and that he only showed his head at the moment of his appearance at the door."

"He wasn't Rufus Bunnell?"

"Oh, no—nothing like Rufus!"

"You are sure on this point?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Then who, who, I say—who can the intruder and impostor have been, Mrs. Mansion?"

The housekeeper shook her head helplessly.

She could not even make a suggestion.

In the interval of silence that succeeded the question, there came a knock at the side-door.

"See who it is," said Harmon Mapleton.

Mrs. Mansion stepped in the direction indicated, while the Lord of the Isle secured a revolver on his person.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEMAND OF BUNNELL.

THE housekeeper was absent only a moment, but returned looking startled.

"The visitor is Rufus Bunnell," she announced. "He wants to see you."

"I will see him outside," said the Lord of the Isle, with an involuntary frown. "Remain here, Mrs. Mansion, to be within call."

It was with his haughtiest aspect and manner that the Lord of the Isle took his way out to the shaded walk to which the visitor had retreated, as if ill at ease in regard to the reception which might be accorded him.

"You here again, Rufus Bunnell?" was the greeting of Harmon Mapleton.

"As you see, sir."

The young man folded his arms upon his breast, and looked at the Lord of the Isle with a calmness contrasting strangely with the latter's excitement.

"Didn't I tell you, when you asked me about Dorie, to leave the island, and never show your face here again?"

"I believe you did make some such remark, Mr. Mapleton, but I am here on such important business, and especially under such circumstances, that I am quite sure you will excuse me for disobeying the order in question."

The manner of the young man was in itself a revelation.

It showed that he considered himself the master of the situation.

"On business, eh?" queried the Lord of the Isle. "Of what nature?"

"The same as before, sir!"

As Bunnell made this declaration, a gleam of light fell upon his face from a lamp in the hands of Mrs. Mansion, who was crossing the front hall, and very significant was the expression of that dark visage.

"You refer to my ward, I presume?" continued the Lord of the Isle.

"Yes, sir. I come here, as before, to speak of your ward, Miss Dorie."

"She's missing, Rufus," said her guardian, giving expression involuntarily to the great sorrow which filled his soul. "I cannot find her. It is in vain that I have searched the house—"

"You can spare yourself all trouble of that nature, Mr. Mapleton," interrupted Bunnell, with smiling calmness. "Your ward is in my hands, sir, and in my hands she will remain until further advices. I have carried her off to a place of safe-keeping!"

The Lord of the Isle started as if a knife had pierced his vitals.

His pure and gentle ward in the hands of this coarse and vulgar ruffian!

"Dog," he cried, drawing his revolver, "I am tempted to kill you!"

"Then dismiss the temptation!" returned Bunnell, meeting his glance defiantly. "I am not one of those helpless sailors you have lured to their death this night, Harmon Mapleton!"

The effect of these words upon the Lord of the Isle was so great as to hold him speechless.

It was the first time he had ever been accused to his face of being the leader of the gang of wreckers who had become the terror of the islands.

"Another thing," pursued Bunnell, "I have hidden Dorie where she will die of starvation if

I do not return to her. Her life depends upon mine, Harmon Mapleton. So, do not be violent. Do not lose your patience, but hear me."

The Lord of the Isle was still too excited to find utterance.

"That point duly realized," finished Bunnell, "you are in a fair way to negotiate with me. I am here to demand again the hand of your ward in marriage."

A glance at the defiant countenance before him told Harmon Mapleton that his visitor was perfectly honest in accusing him of being the leader of the wreckers.

Why and how he had acquired this belief, was a proper subject of investigation.

In regard to the demand of Bunnell, however, there could be only one answer.

To give his ward in marriage to Rufus Bunnell was simply impossible, and would have remained so in any and every contingency, even if there had been no question of her betrothal to Paul.

Such an act would violate every sense of propriety and dignity, not to speak of any more delicate sentiment.

Bunnell was not in any sense a gentleman, neither honest nor attractive.

He was even less worthy than he had been at the moment of his arrival at Mapleton Island, in quest of a humble place in the Lord of the Isle's garden.

He had never been recognized as a suitor for the hand of Dorie, and had never been long enough in her company to arouse in her soul even the ordinary sentiments of friendship.

In a word, the demand of Bunnell could not be entertained for a single instant.

Nevertheless, in view of the fact that Dorie was a captive in the hands of her unwelcome suitor, it seemed necessary to temporize and be prudent, and not drive the visitor to desperation.

Having reached this decision, the Lord of the Isle restored his revolver to his pocket, forcing himself by a resolute effort to assume the aspect of calmness.

"I was hasty," he said. "The disappearance of Dorie had nearly driven me frantic. She is safe, you say?"

"Perfectly safe, sir—if nothing prevents me from going to her relief."

"Very well. Let us see if we cannot arrive at an understanding."

He beckoned his visitor away from the house, adding:

"Let's take a turn in the garden. I know not how many of the servants may be watching us. In any case, we are liable to be interrupted here from one moment to another."

If Bunnell had any suspicions of the Lord of the Isle, he did not express them.

He evidently felt able to take care of himself in any contingency that might be presented.

Evidently, too, his interest in the subject under discussion was great enough to have caused him to face even greater dangers than any which now beset him.

He followed his late employer in silence until they had reached a retired spot in the garden, and then he came to a halt, with the remark:

"I am now ready to hear you."

"One word only in regard to the accusation you have seen fit to hurl against me, Rufus," said Harmon Mapleton. "I deny emphatically that I am the leader of the gang of outlaws to whose actions you have made allusion."

"Of course—of course," sneered Bunnell, with his habitual coarseness.

Inasmuch, however, as I shall doubtless soon hear this accusation from persons of more consequence than you, Rufus," continued the Lord of the Isle, "I do not think it necessary to waste a moment at the present time to ask you for your reasons. All that is a matter that can be discussed to-morrow, or later."

"Any time you choose, sir," said Bunnell, with the air of being content with the progress he was making.

"In the mean time, I think I see just where you stand. You have carried off Dorie to make sure of her, and you hurl at my head the accusation in question in order to force me to consent to your marriage!"

"That's about the state of the case, sir, in whatever terms it may be expressed."

"Then hear my decision, Rufus. The poor child cannot pass the night in the terrible situation in which you have placed her. Go to her at once, Rufus, and bring her home. Tell her that you have seen me, and that she is to preserve the utmost secrecy in regard to all that has happened."

"And this done?"

"You and I will come to some understanding in the course of to-morrow. I'll find occasion to-morrow noon to summon you to my library. It is enough to say for the moment that I will either assent to your demand for the hand of Dorie, or that I will give you a satisfactory equivalent."

"There can be no satisfactory equivalent for the hand of Miss Dorie, sir," declared Bunnell impressively. "I shall stick to that demand as the one point upon which all our arrangements must turn."

"So be it, if I cannot furnish good reasons for a change in your views."

Bunnell reflected rapidly.

He felt that he had substantially carried his point, although a closer scrutiny of the words of his late employer would have told him that they could have no such construction.

So far as he could see, there could be no objection to the return of Dorie.

He even smiled at thinking how readily he could bring her home, with the airs of a deliverer, and without allowing her to form even a suspicion that she had been a prisoner in his hands.

And finally he was conceited enough to believe that he had such a hold upon the Lord of the Isle that the latter would not dare set any trap for him or give him a refusal.

"I accept your suggestion, Mr. Mapleton," he declared, "if you will not say a word to her about this interview!"

"I give you my promise."

"I will bring Dorie home in the course of two or three hours. Her promise of secrecy will be sufficient until I see you again. This is all I need say, I believe. After she is again with you, I shall go to Mother Wheeler's for the night, and it is there that you will find me tomorrow. I shall simply say that you have taken me back into your service!"

"Very well, Rufus. I shall depend upon the prompt restoration of my ward, and upon your subsequent discretion. Bring Dorie back to us as soon as you can, and remain quiet at Mrs. Wheeler's until you hear from me."

Bunnell bowed assent.

"My belief and expectation is," added the Lord of the Isle, "that we shall not have occasion to exchange another disagreeable word upon the subjects of which we have been speaking."

His manner was so quiet and conciliatory that the visitor did not have to analyze his words, but jumped at the conclusion that they were equivalent to an assent to his wishes.

"Thanks," he said, with a profound inclination. "I see clearly enough that there will be no trouble between us."

In another instant he had vanished.

"The indescribable miscreant!" mentally ejaculated the Lord of the Isle, looking after the retreating figure of Bunnell. "If we do not get rid of him forever before this hour to-morrow, I shall be greatly mistaken!"

A moment he persisted in that stern gaze, his soul a flood of inquiries.

"Ought I to have seized him?" he asked himself. "In that case, what horrors might befall Dorie! Ought I to have made an attempt to follow him to his lair? How could I, in this fog, as he is doubtless using a row-boat? Impossible to follow him without being seen!" and he groaned. "I must wait in patience!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FATHER AND SON.

THE wild storm which had arisen in the soul of Harmon Mapleton was not at all allayed by the promise of Rufus Bunnell to restore his ward to him.

The fact remained that he had the gravest of difficulties in his path, even if he should have no further words with Dorie's unwelcome suitor.

"Of course the fellow has a reason for thinking me the leader of the wreckers," he said to himself, as he began walking nervously to and fro on the lawn. "He must have seen my sinister double in the act of showing a false light, or he must have been assured by some one in whom he has confidence that I am really the head of that infernal brotherhood. Possibly he may be able to tell me how this widespread belief in my guilt has arisen!"

He started violently, as rapid footsteps fell upon his hearing, coming from the direction of his brother's cottage.

"Who's there?" he called sharply, as the footsteps suddenly ceased, and a dark figure vanished behind an intervening clump of bushes.

"It is I, father!"

"Paul!"

"I thought you'd be astonished! But here I am, nevertheless!"

And with this Paul precipitated himself upon his overjoyed parent, wringing the hand offered him with all the fervor of boyish affection and respect.

"So, it is you, my own noble boy?" cried the Lord of the Isle, as soon as he could command his emotions. "But how came you here so soon? In a boat chartered especially for the trip, I suppose?"

The returned wanderer assented, the declaration being the literal truth.

"I am so delighted to see you! All the more so, perhaps, because we did not expect you until Saturday. Come into the house. How you have grown!"

He moved toward the house, but Paul looked toward the light without offering to follow him.

"I suppose Dorie has received my letters and knew I was coming?" resumed the young traveler.

"Yes—"

The response was hesitating and disturbed, as was natural, since the happy father hardly knew how to tell the ardent young lover that his betrothed was missing.

"She is well, I hope?" pursued Paul quickly.

"Never in better health, and so impatient to see you."

Paul heaved a sigh of relief.

"Nevertheless, Paul, I am too honest and straightforward not to tell you that quite a misfortune has overtaken Dorie. In a word, she has been carried off to some island or to the mainland by a rustic admirer named Rufus Bunnell!"

"Against her will, you mean?"

"Certainly. But the rascal has just left me, and he promises to have her back here in the course of two or three hours."

He hastened to give such details of the situation as he thought desirable, while Paul stared at him in speechless pain and terror.

"Will he keep his word, do you think?" asked Paul when his father had concluded.

"I think he will."

"Strange what a state of lawlessness and crime seems to reign at our once happy island," said Paul with deep feeling. "Are you aware that the *Flying Glim* has been shown again this evening, and that a large three-masted schooner has gone ashore and possibly been dashed in pieces, on the Outer Beaver?"

"Is such really the case, Paul?"

"It is, sir. I saw the false light myself. It was shown on Patsey Reef, and while it was visible, the real light—that at the end of the island—remained extinguished or covered, at least on the water side. These two circumstances will show you at a glance the depth of infamy to which these wreckers have descended!"

The Lord of the Isle shivered as if an icy blast had struck him.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"Through the simple circumstance that our pilot was too wide-awake for the wreckers. He had taken the precaution to put a lantern at the heel of his bowsprit and to guide his course rigidly by it. In this way he was able to detect the precise moment when the real light vanished and the false light took its place, since the change in the bearing of the lights was too great to be explained by any possible swing of the vessel between two flashes."

"And what then?"

"Why, our pilot steered accordingly. Instead of taking the false light for his guide, he steered precisely as if the real light had been shining, and in this way he kept out of all danger. Afterward, when the real light appeared, we took our way in safety to the Pool Anchor-
age. I forgot to mention that our craft is a steamer."

"Ah, a steamer?" exclaimed the father, with a start. "What sort of a steamer?"

Paul gave a brief description of it.

"It's not the one I was thinking of," said the Lord of the Isle, who was of course thinking of the one which had so nearly cost him his life. "Did you charter it yourself?"

"No, sir. What I say about it must be said in strictest confidence, but I need not hesitate to tell you that I came down the lake as the guest of Colonel Gibson, the Chief of Police of Chicago!"

"Indeed, Paul!"

"Yes, sir. Chief Gibson has come down here in person to look after the *Flying Glim* and the cut-throats behind it. My meeting with him was quite accidental, as you will see by a brief explanation."

He hastened to give the few words that seemed to be called for in this connection, and then added:

"It is hardly necessary to say that the colonel and his young pilot, with Captain Bush, have done all in their power to make my voyage with them a pleasant one, and I have no doubt you will take great pleasure in returning the civilities they have so kindly showered upon me."

"Of course I shall, Paul," declared the Lord of the Isle. "But—"

He paused, in a state of painful agitation which Paul had never before seen him exhibit. It was hard—oh, how hard!—to touch upon the terrible accusations of which the Lord of the Isle had become the object.

"But what, father?" asked Paul.

The father nerved himself for the terrible task devolving upon him.

"Did not Colonel Gibson have a great deal to say about me?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—as was natural, seeing that he had your son for his guest."

"And—and all he said was pleasant and agreeable?"

"Why, of course!"

"Yet—he talked of the *Flying Glim*, Paul?"

"Freely enough, sir."

"And told you all that has been going on in this neighborhood during the three years you have been absent in Europe?"

"Of course. Let me give you a resume of what he has told me!"

He hastened to indicate the nature of the communications which had been made to him, precisely as we have made them known to the reader.

The father drew a sigh of relief.

"From all this," he commented, "it seems that Colonel Gibson and his friends have been

very thoughtful and considerate. Otherwise, they might have told you, Paul, that a score of tongues are accusing me of being the leader of these terrible wreckers."

He had expected to see Paul start as if lightning had struck him, but the youth received the observation as quietly as he had received any of those preceding.

"There is a reason, my dear father—and one that touches us closely—for the accusation to which you refer," he said, with a seriousness which had never before appeared upon his handsome boyish face. "Can you bear up under one of the most terrible shocks which can possibly afflict a human being? I know who the guilty leader of those men is!"

"You, Paul?" cried the father, staring at our hero in the wildest bewilderment. "Impossible!"

"He is our nearest relative, father," added Paul. "In a word, he's *Uncle Peter*!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PAUL'S VIEWS OF THE SITUATION.

HAD the earth opened beneath the feet of the Lord of the Isle, he could not have been more astonished than he was at Paul's declaration.

Not that the assertion was in itself impossible or even improbable.

But that Paul should make it!

Paul, at the very moment, as it were, of his return from a long residence in Europe!

How could he have attained to such a theory so quickly?

Still more singular, how could he have reached any personal knowledge of such a fact?

"Your words stab me like a knife, Paul," said the Lord of the Isle, with a countenance which had taken upon itself the hue of death.

"I am sure you do not intend to be rash or hasty—sure that you would not even wound my feelings without good and sufficient cause. Let us weigh our words well. Tell me frankly what you have discovered or suspect. But remember that you are speaking of a man, who, whatever may be his faults and short-comings—and they are confessedly many and serious—is still your uncle!"

"I am only too conscious of that man's relationship to us," returned our hero, as a heightened color crept into his cheeks. "Your pride of race and family is no greater than mine. But between an honest and honorable father and an ignoble and guilty uncle, no right-minded son could hesitate a single moment. It is time to speak, father! It is time the awful clouds resting upon our name and house were forever banished! I propose to speak of all these things, my dear father, and to speak of them with the fullest freedom!"

"But think of it, Paul! You've been home less than an hour! What can you know to warrant your awful declaration?"

"A great deal—as you shall see in due course!"

"But your uncle is a helpless paralytic, who has to be fed by his wife, and who cannot even turn over in bed without assistance—"

"All that is a popular impression, belief or supposition—whatever we may call it—which may have never had the least foundation in fact," declared Paul, earnestly. "There is not the least evidence in existence of a satisfactory nature that Uncle Peter ever had a stroke of apoplexy, or that he has ever for a moment been a paralytic!"

The father was too startled to reply.

He took several turns on the lawn with steps which attested the wild agitation of his soul.

At length he halted in front of the returned wanderer.

"What you say," he avowed, "is the absolute truth, Paul, as surprised as I am to hear you express such views so soon after your return. As a simple matter of fact, all that has ever been said about the bodily and mental condition of my brother has been said on hearsay. Doctor Matthews did not see him in an apoplectic fit, but took the statements respecting it at second hand from the lips of your aunt. It is really quite possible that we have all been, for all these years, the dupes of a rank and lying imposture!"

Paul expressed his keen satisfaction at these concessions, and resumed:

"For reasons into which I shall soon enter more fully, I have no hesitation in saying that Uncle Peter has never been ill a moment; never had any fit; has never been a paralytic! You wrote me, a year ago, that he was still as bad off as ever, unable to get out of bed or feed himself, but that he had actually refused to have a council of physicians called upon his case, although you had again and again suggested and insisted that he would accept this final attempt to do something for him!"

"Yes, he refused, Paul!"

"And why, if you please?"

"He said he knew such a consultation would remain wholly fruitless, and that it would be a sheer waste of money!"

"I remember—that was the reason he gave for his refusal; and just think for a moment how thin it is! If the loss of the money in question had been of the least consequence, you would have felt a thousand times repaid for its

expenditure in knowing that you had spared no effort to afford your brother relief."

"You are right, Paul. You take a perfectly sound view of that point."

"But of course the reason given was not the real one," pursued Paul.

"Then what was it?"

"Why, he was afraid that the proposed consultation would lead to the discovery that he was shamming! Just think of his full face and robust figure, his ruddy complexion, his clear eyes, his brawny hands and limbs—all of those indications of health and strength you have so often reported, in such wonder, in your letters to me during my absence! Is it wise to shut our eyes to evidences and suggestions of this nature, and pin our faith to a few whining complaints from Uncle Peter and his wife? Would it not be a wiser course to put the supposed patient on the defensive, and ask him to explain why it is that his terrible affliction has failed to give him, in three long years, the least sign of illness?"

The Lord of the Isle started uneasily, as if the suggestions of Paul had literally stung him.

"How often I have thought of those things—and even discussed them," he said—"and then dismissed them abruptly, lest I should do my poor brother a terrible injustice! What you have said, my son, brings back to me with renewed force all those doubts and queries which have assailed me in your absence. But let us come to the motive, Paul, inasmuch as all rational acts have one. If your uncle is really the impostor you have suggested, what is the objective point of his action?"

"I can answer that question in a single word, father. *Revenge!*"

The father echoed the word in a barely audible whisper, coming to a halt, and staring into empty space with the air of a man who suddenly finds himself confronted by a frightful vision.

"But there is still another word which must be taken into account," continued our hero, halting near his father, "and that is *greed*. Greed and revenge are really the motives of Uncle Peter's terrible plot against us!"

"You think there is a plot, then?"

"A terrible and sinister plot, father, on the part of Uncle Peter and his wife!"

"Will you indicate its nature?"

"Certainly. In brief terms, it is to bring your good name into disgrace, and to cause you to be arrested and punished as a fiendish criminal—you, my dear father—and so open the road for Uncle Peter to become the 'Lord of the Isle' in your place! To attain to this result, Uncle Peter and his wife would gladly consign you to the gallows!"

The Lord of the Isle held up his hands, with a sudden movement, as if to shield himself from a deadly blow.

He even recoiled two or three steps in undisguised and uncontrollable horror, with a countenance which seemed set in stern reprobation toward the youthful speaker.

But gradually the uplifted hands of Harmon Mapleton descended to his sides, and the wild look of horror and reprobation died out of his eyes.

"You have startled me as no human being ever startled me before, Paul," he declared, slowly, "but you have opened to me an abyss which cannot be talked out of existence! There is serious matter for reflection and investigation under every word you have uttered."

"Thank you, my dear father," cried Paul, with moistened eyes, as he advanced a couple of steps rapidly and warmly embraced the Lord of the Isle. "I am glad to see that you are awake at last! The abyss of which you have caught such terrible glimpses will be closed again! I have returned from my long wanderings in time to save you and Dorie—ay, and myself, for I should die if harm happened to either of you—and I do not doubt that a few short hours or days will roll away all our darknesses forever!"

"Paul—my glorious soul!" cried the father, his eyes shining tenderly through a mist of tears, and his voice freighted with an infinite gladness—"you are no longer a boy, but a man. How is it that your thoughts have been directed into these channels? How is it that you have returned so clear-sighted into a scene where so many of us seem to have lost the use of our reason?"

"It is only because the impostor has carried his deceit a little too far," replied Paul. "I cannot take the least credit to myself for what I have discovered concerning the guilt of Uncle Peter."

"Ah! you have made some real discovery, then, cried the father.

"As you shall see, with as few words as possible. Listen, father. The very first man who met me here on my arrival to-night was Uncle Peter."

The Lord of the Isle remained speechless and dazed to stupefaction.

"He not only appeared in disguise—disguised to resemble you—but he actually presented himself to me in your name! His voice even resembled yours, and at first it did not even occur to me to doubt that he was my father. He proceeded to say that he was on his way to the lake

to drown himself, for the reason that he was a very wicked man, and that the officers of the law were about to lay their hands upon him. In response to my protestations and demands, he declared himself the head of the *Glim* gang, and explained at some length how he had been driven into these crimes by pecuniary distress. In a word, he told me such a story as to almost drive me to despair, and for a few moments my whole soul was in such a state of chaos that I could find no word to refute him!"

"Are you sure of all this, Paul?" cried his father, finding his voice at last. "It seems to me like some hideous nightmare—like some awful illusion."

"Listen another moment only! When he had closed his pretended confession and left me, father," pursued Paul, "the spell which had until then enchained my faculties seemed to be broken. I realized that the man who had been saying such things to me in your name must necessarily be an abominable impostor! I remembered that you are no such man as he had depicted—"

"My noble boy!"

"In a word, I asked myself who he could possibly be, and as quick as a flash came the answer—your Uncle Peter! To verify the point, I hurried as fast as possible to his cottage. Gaining admittance—I'll explain how later—I found Aunt Margaret asleep in a chair in the sitting-room. As to the bed in the corner—the bed of Uncle Peter—it was empty! As I had foreseen, Uncle Peter was not there! He was neither in the house nor upon the premises! The evidence of his horrible duplicity and wickedness was complete!"

For nearly a minute the Lord of the Isle stood as if petrified, with Heaven only knows what dreadful recognitions dawning more and more clearly upon his soul.

It is doubtful if he could have moved or spoken to save his life.

But at last he recovered the use of his faculties, and his first use of them was to precipitate himself upon our hero, and press him again and again to his heart, while a torrent of incoherent thanksgivings escaped him.

"You see, therefore, my dear father," resumed Paul, returning the caresses showered upon him, "how the terrible accusation against you has arisen, and what there is behind it. For the moment," and he looked along the path leading from the lake, "we shall have to adjourn the discussion of the details of the situation. I see a man approaching, and shall not be surprised if he turns out to be Colonel Gibson."

A sort of irresistible tremor passed over the form of Harmon Mapleton.

"Is the colonel alone?" he asked.

"So far as I can see—yes!"

"That speaks well for both his courtesy and his courage," said the father. "Let us step that way to meet him!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ASTOUNDING DISCOVERIES.

It was with a very quiet, but serious mien, that Colonel Gibson approached his late passenger, saluting him pleasantly, and exchanging respectful salutations with the Lord of the Isle, to whom Paul gave him a formal introduction.

"As you see, Paul," then observed the colonel, "I have availed myself of your kind invitation to call much sooner than I at first intended. The truth is, I decided that Captain Bush and Wally could represent me adequately at the Outer Beaver, and that I could best subserve the weighty interests which have brought me to the islands by promptly paying my respects to the Lord of the Isle."

"I am very glad to make your personal acquaintance, Colonel Gibson," returned Harmon Mapleton, with a sincerity which did not admit of question. "My son has told me how kind you have been to him since leaving Chicago, and I realize keenly how fortunate he has been in meeting you. You will, of course, honor us with your presence, colonel, as long as you remain at the island. Please walk in."

He led the way toward the front door, which Mrs. Mansion had already thrown open, she having been hovering about it with such keen interest as to remark the visitor's arrival.

"You have a very beautiful home, Mr. Mapleton," observed Chief Gibson, with an appreciative glance at his surroundings, as he followed his host, Paul bringing up the rear. "I believe you were born here?"

"Yes, sir, and so were my father and grandfather before me. The island has belonged to our family since 1700, or long before the American Revolution!"

"No wonder that you are attached to it, as well as possessed of a just pride in it," pursued the colonel. "Has it ceased to be productive?"

"Not in the least, sir. Its crops this year have been better than ever!"

"Has it any drawbacks whatever as a property or a residence?" continued the visitor, as he followed his host into the drawing-room, which the housekeeper had lighted brilliantly.

"No, sir, except that certain unknown criminals—of whom we will soon speak further—

have brought suspicion and disgrace upon it," declared the Lord of the Isle, as he advanced an easy-chair for the use of his guest. "In regard to soil, climate, production, scenery, and all other essentials, I know of no spot on the wide earth which presents greater charms than Mapleton Island, and it has always been one of the greatest consolations of my life to think that this princely domain will be the heritage of my son and the dear girl, who, as his wife, is so soon to become its mistress!"

The Lord of the Isle not only spoke with sincerity, but with deep feeling.

"I congratulate you, sir, upon these views and sentiments," said Colonel Gibson, extending his hand and shaking that of his host warmly. "They are worthy of the long line of honorable ancestors by whom you have been preceded!"

"Of course you've had supper, at this late hour, colonel," said Harmon Mapleton, as the visitor seated himself, "but is there nothing you would like, a mouthful to eat or a drop to drink?"

"Nothing whatever, sir, if you will excuse my frankness, and accept my best thanks for the offer," declared the colonel, as he extended his hands toward the fire. Mrs. Mansion had kindled betimes in the grate. "What I desire most, Mr. Mapleton, is to have the pleasure of your company, and that of your son, during the next half hour, if you have no especial use for your time."

"Of course Paul and I are perfectly at your disposal, colonel," declared the Lord of the Isle, as he took a seat near his guest, an example promptly followed by his son. "It is scarcely necessary to add," and he smiled sadly, "that we both accept your presence here, colonel, as an indication that there is very important and serious business awaiting our attention!"

"Well, yes," avowed the colonel, moving a little uneasily in his chair, but turning a candid and respectful gaze upon his host. "As Paul has doubtless told you, I have come down the lake upon no less an undertaking than the discovery of the parties who have for several years been showing false lights in this vicinity, thereby causing the loss of numerous lives and a great deal of property. As Mapleton Island has been the scene of a number of these crimes, I regard it as a simple matter of duty and respect, and even of good faith and good feeling, Mr. Mapleton, to call upon you with this brief statement of my business, and ask you for such advice and assistance as you may be able to give me."

"I thank you very much for your kindly confidence, Colonel Gibson," replied the Lord of the Isle, "and shall do all in my power to render your mission in this neighborhood a success."

Chief Gibson bowed gravely, and continued:

"We were speaking of the productiveness of Mapleton Island, and in connection therewith I find myself confronted by a curious problem, concerning which I desire to ask a few questions. If your lands are as productive in the present as in the past, how does it happen that you have put such a large mortgage upon your possessions?"

"A—a mortgage?" stammered the Lord of the Isle, with the profoundest amazement. "I do not understand you!"

"Then I will be more explicit."

The colonel drew from a side-pocket a formidable-looking document, which he proceeded to unfold leisurely, hardly removing his gaze from the countenance of his host.

"I have here," he resumed, "a copy of a document which purports to have been executed by you on the seventeenth of last month, and which has been duly recorded in the office of the clerk of this county. It is nothing more nor less than a mortgage upon all your possessions on Mapleton Island, and is designed to cover a loan of fifty thousand dollars which you have made of one of our popular insurance companies for a term of five years, with interest payable annually!"

The Lord of the Isle raised his hands in horrified wonder, looking as white as if death had set its seal upon him.

"Are you serious, Colonel Gibson?" he cried, extending his hand for the document the visitor had spread out upon the table before him. "Do you really mean to say that there exists a mortgage of the character indicated?"

"What! do you know nothing of the existence of any such mortgage, Mr. Mapleton?"

"No more than a babe unborn! This is the first word I have ever heard in relation to any such matter."

"Then look for yourself, sir!"

Chief Gibson threw down the copy of the mortgage with a somewhat impatient gesture, as if a suspicion that he was not being treated in good faith had flashed upon him.

"There it is, sir, in black and white," he added, with some excitement. "You will see that it is complete and explicit in every particular!"

With staring eyes and half-suspended respiration, the Lord of the Isle proceeded to take cognizance of the document, while Paul locked over his shoulder, appearing almost as startled and terrified as his father.

For a brief space there reigned in the drawing-room a silence like that of the grave, only the rustling of the paper under the hands of Harmon Mapleton falling upon the hearing.

"What a horrible forgery!" at length came from the white lips of the Lord of the Isle, as he raised his eyes to Paul's features.

"A forgery!" cried the colonel.

"An infamous, unheard-of falsification and fraud from beginning to end!" declared Harmon Mapleton, as he involuntarily compressed the document into a shapeless mass. "I have never made any such mortgage; never signed any such mortgage; never received any such money; and have never spoken a word to any human being upon the subject of any such mortgage or any other!"

These declarations were too explicit to require the least elucidation.

They covered the whole subject under discussion, and could only be accepted as truths or rejected as falsehoods.

For a few moments, during which he regarded the father and son with a strange perplexity of gaze, Colonel Gibson did not move or speak.

"Strange that you have not sooner heard of the existence of this mortgage!" he then said. "The subject has been mentioned, to my knowledge, in many of the newspapers of Chicago, as well as in those of Milwaukee and other cities."

"In explanation of this ignorance on my part," said Harmon Mapleton, "I have only to say that I have scarcely glanced at a newspaper for several weeks past. All my attention has been absorbed in matters growing out of the outrages committed by the gang of wreckers you have come here to unearth. As to my son, he has been absent, as you are aware, and can of course have had no cognizance of the mortgage, or of any reference to it in the newspapers."

Chief Gibson bowed understandingly, but with increased gravity of manner.

To his logical and comprehensive mind, the neglect of his host to read the newspapers was just as consistent with the theory of his guilt as with that of his innocence.

Evidently the visitor was becoming keenly critical and interested in the investigation he had undertaken.

"In good truth, what should I want of the fifty thousand dollars in question?" continued the Lord of the Isle, breaking a somewhat oppressive silence. "What use could I make of it? Why should I borrow it?"

"Have you never had any need of a loan of the sort, not even temporarily?" asked Gibson.

"Never, sir! I've never borrowed a dollar of any man since I came into possession of this property."

"Then you have not been embarrassed financially?"

"No, sir!"

"Neither within a few weeks nor at any time previous?"

"Never, Colonel Gibson. There has never been a moment in my life when I have been short of money or in any way cramped for the want of it. And even if such had been the case, I should have possessed an easy way out of the dilemma. I should have only been compelled to sell a portion of the bonds and stocks in my possession!"

At this remark, Chief Gibson started, with an air of sudden and intense interest, and moved his chair sufficiently to bring him face to face with his host.

"Your observation leads us to another point of the investigation, Mr. Mapleton," he declared. "I have been told that your bonds and mortgages were all sold several months ago!"

"Then you have been misinformed, sir," returned Harmon Mapleton. "As already indicated, I have never had occasion to resort to any such method of raising money. In a word, Colonel Gibson I never sold a bond, or caused one to be sold, in my life!"

"I am to understand, then, that the large block of bonds and stocks you were once known to carry are still in your possession?"

"That is the exact state of the case, Colonel Gibson. I still possess about a hundred thousand dollars in these values, as has been the case for a dozen years past!"

The flush upon Colonel Gibson's face deepened, his excitement becoming more manifest.

"May I ask you where you keep your bonds and stocks?" he resumed.

"Certainly. In a safe in my study, which is off my bedroom. Formerly I kept them in a bank in Chicago, and later with a safe deposit company, but one or two robberies and embezzlements in that quarter made me think that they would be safer in my own hands than anywhere else!"

"And so they are now in your possession?"

"Yes, sir!"

"In this very house? At this very moment?"

"Exactly!"

The colonel arose deliberately, with a manner which seemed less pleasant than his former demeanor.

"How long since you saw the bonds and stocks in question?" he asked.

The Lord of the Isle reflected a few moments.

"I cannot say exactly how long," he answered. "Perhaps five or six weeks—perhaps a couple of months!"

"Indeed? So long? Would it not be wise to look a little closer after their safe-keeping?"

"I dare say it would."

"But you have been preoccupied about other matters, as you mentioned?"

"Such has been the case, sir."

"Under the circumstances in which we find ourselves, therefore, I think it would be well for us all to take a look at these bonds. I would like to know that they are still in your possession!"

"Nothing is easier than to verify the matter," said Harmon Mapleton, as he also arose, taking a lamp from the mantle-piece. "Please follow me up-stairs to my study!"

He led the way to the apartment indicated, and the three men were presently standing in front of the safe of which the host had spoken.

"Not a very large or massive safe," observed the Lord of the Isle, "but the makers thought it would be quite sufficient for my purpose."

Holding his lamp near the dial, he set about opening the safe.

The combination being a simple one, the stout door was soon thrown open.

"Evidently," observed Chief Gibson, breathlessly, "the safe has not been tampered with!"

"That's clear enough," returned the host. "As to the securities of which we were speaking, I keep them in this central drawer, to which there is a special key!"

Procuring this key from his watch-chain, upon which he wore it as a charm, the Lord of the Isle unlocked the drawer to which he had called attention and drew it open.

What a cry was that which escaped him!

The drawer was empty!

CHAPTER XX.

PURSuing THE INVESTIGATION.

As Colonel Gibson saw that the drawer was destitute of contents, a sort of involuntary smile flickered over his features.

It was clear enough from his manner that he had not expected any other outcome to the investigation, and that he was not in the least surprised to find the bonds and stocks missing.

Upon Paul and his father, however, the discovery came with overwhelming force.

They could only stare at the vacuum so unexpectedly revealed to their gaze.

"Perhaps they're in one of the other drawers, father," suggested Paul, at the end of a few moments of speechless consternation.

The Lord of the Isle caught eagerly at the wild hope thus presented.

The various drawers of the safe were opened in rapid succession, but only with the result of plunging the father and son deeper and deeper into a maze of wonder and disappointment.

"Clearly enough, they're gone!" exclaimed the Lord of the Isle, in a hollow whisper, and with a countenance of the gloomiest description. "Who can have stolen them?"

"Evidently some one who possessed the combination," responded Chief Gibson, with a countenance and with a voice in which there was a barely perceptible trace of irony. "You see that the safe has not been tampered with, or you would not have so readily effected an entrance. No attempt has been made to blow it open, as far as I can see. How many persons, Mr. Mapleton, are in possession of the combination?"

"No one save my ward and myself."

"Your ward? Miss Dorie Ames?" queried Chief Gibson, with the air of knowing who and what she was.

"Yes, sir. Dorie has been in the habit of depositing the silver in the safe every night, and taking it out every morning, and for these and other reasons I intrusted her with the combination."

"Of course there is no occasion to ask if she is honest," said Gibson. "You mentioned, I think, that she is betrothed to your son. Her parents are dead, and she has no friend or relative who would be likely to share her knowledge and take advantage of it. Has Mrs. Mansion had access to the safe?"

"No, sir."

"You regard her as honest?"

"Perfectly so, but I did not think it necessary for her to have access to the safe. Dorie is perfectly competent to have the care of the silver and it is quite within her province to see to its safe-keeping."

As the Lord of the Isle made this declaration, he exchanged a significant glance with his son, whose attention, like his own, had been fixed upon the fact that Chief Gibson had uttered the housekeeper's name of his own knowledge, it not having been previously mentioned since his arrival at the villa.

That glance was as much as to say that the visitor had well informed himself concerning the composition of the household in some manner and through some agency which had not yet been revealed.

"Where is your ward, sir?" asked the colonel, after a brief silence.

"She has been abducted since nightfall—car-

ried off secretly by a young man who was formerly in my employ—a fellow named Rufus Bunnell!"

"Carried off? Abducted?" repeated Chief Gibson, in undisguised astonishment.

"Yes. Bunnell professes to be madly in love with my ward, and his evident intention was to force her to consent to his marriage with her!"

"Whither can he have taken her?"

"Doubtless to one of the outlying islands. I may as well add that the rascal has been here within an hour, and has promised to bring my ward back as soon as he can: probably within two or three hours, so that his hiding-place cannot be far distant!"

"A high-handed proceeding, I should think," commented Chief Gibson, thoughtfully. "I regard Bunnell as a thoroughly conscienceless ruffian, but it seems odd that he should stand so little in awe of you as to venture upon such a daring measure as the abduction of your ward. Of course the girl is perfectly antagonistic to him?"

"Perfectly. His act is simply an unwarrantable outrage for which I propose to hold him to the strictest account."

"Let us hope that he will bring her back, as promised. If not, we'll take prompt measures to find her. But even her return will not throw any light upon the problem we are discussing, namely, the disappearance of these bonds. Have you a list of them?"

"Naturally."

"Can you readily put your hand upon it?"

"I think so."

The Lord of the Isle stepped to his desk at one side of the library, and passed in review a number of papers occupying one of its drawers.

"Yes, here it is," he announced, returning to Gibson's side. "I can soon tell you what they are."

"One moment, please," said Gibson, as he drew up a chair and sat down beside his host, motioning him to be seated. "If I am not mistaken, I am in possession of a list of bonds and stocks which will be found substantially a duplicate of that in your hand!"

Opening his purse carefully, the visitor drew out a small slip of paper covered with figures and writing, and held it up to the gaze of his host.

"Sure enough," acknowledged the latter, looking more startled than ever.

There was no necessity of making an elaborate comparison of the two lists.

The one was an exact duplicate of the other!

"May I ask how you came by that list, Colonel Gibson?" asked the host, as soon as he could speak.

"I copied it from the books of Peabody & Miller, the well-known bankers and brokers of Chicago," explained Gibson. "They purchased these bonds, on the sixteenth of last month, from a man who claimed to be Harmon Mapleton, and who furnished them with these titles and numbers in the order in which you have jotted them down. A check was given in payment, to the order of the seller, and here it is!"

As he finished speaking, the visitor placed under the eyes of his host a check which, as a practiced eye could have seen at a glance, had been duly paid by the bank upon which it was drawn. It was for a trifle more than a hundred thousand dollars, and bore the indorsement of "Harmon Mapleton."

"After what has been said, Mr. Mapleton, I suppose that is not your signature?" added Colonel Gibson, with a slight return of the irony to which we have alluded.

For a moment the Lord of the Isle looked bewildered, as his eyes rested upon the signature in question, it being such a clever forgery that he had to look two or three times before he could see wherein it was lacking.

"Of course it is a forgery," he declared, his voice husky with emotion. "I never saw this check before, and am entirely a stranger to its history. I did not sell these bonds, nor was I in Chicago on the sixteenth of last month. It has been more than a year since I was out of sight of Mapleton Island!"

"This is all very strange," said Colonel Gibson, with a puzzled air. "What is your view of the disappearance of the bonds from your safe? Was the party who abstracted them from the drawer in possession of the combination?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But how can he have obtained it?"

"Possibly I may have written it down, although it does not seem likely. It is possible, too, that my ward may have made a memorandum of it, for fear she should forget it. But even then the thief would have been under the necessity of finding this piece of paper and arriving at a full comprehension of it."

"Nor is that all," said Gibson. "After getting into the safe, he would have had to lay hands upon the key of that central drawer: the key you are in the habit of wearing as a charm upon the chain of your watch!"

"Very true, sir," admitted the host. "Nevertheless, it is perfectly clear to me that the thief must have possessed both the combination and the key!"

"Then the next thing to do is to form some theory as to how he secured them!"

Chief Gibson spoke with increased earnestness.

His professional zeal seemed to have become thoroughly aroused.

"I can only suppose," declared the Lord of the Isle after a few moments of reflection, "that the thief must have been secreted in these rooms one evening when my ward got confused over the combination, and asked me to show her anew how to get into the safe. I remember that an incident of this sort really took place, but I cannot recall when, as of course it made no particular impression upon me."

"This suggestion is certainly large enough to cover the point at issue," commented Gibson, with his habitual frankness. "But am I to understand that the thief had it in his power to be 'secreted in these rooms'—to use your phrase—at his good will and pleasure? In that case, you must have some idea who he is. *Who is he?*"

The Lord of the Isle was a little confused by the pointedness of the question.

He hesitated to reply.

"So far as I can judge," continued Colonel Gibson, "the thief is a person who has the combination of your safe; the key of that central drawer or a duplicate of it; a person who resembles you marvelously; a person who gives himself out as Harmon Mapleton and acts in your name; a man who writes your name upon the back of a check so cleverly that you have trouble to detect the forgery; a man who has represented himself to be Harmon Mapleton, for a long time past, not merely on the island, but also in Chicago; in short, a man who must be almost a shadow of yourself, Mr. Mapleton, to do what he has been doing, and to accomplish what he has been accomplishing! Now, *who is he?*"

The Lord of the Isle still hesitated.

Not that the answer was beyond his faculties, or even difficult.

He had only to pronounce the words:

"My brother, Peter Mapleton."

But how hard it was to pronounce them!

It was only when he thought of the mortgage which had been placed upon his son's inheritance; only when he thought of the bonds and stocks stolen from him; only when he thought of the disgrace brought upon his name, and the possible peril in which he himself was undoubtedly standing; and, finally and especially, only when he thought of the lives which had been sacrificed to the revenge and greed of his degenerate brother, that he saw his way clearly in the awful duty which had come upon him.

"Father!" suddenly cried Paul, whose reflections had been substantially the same as those of his afflicted parent.

The Lord of the Isle turned his gaze upon the youth, remarking that he had all he could do to prevent the name of the unworthy uncle from escaping his lips.

"Father, we must answer the colonel's question," declared Paul, as a flood of tears leaped to his eyes, "although I would sooner have died than to do so! *To shield the guilty living is an outrage upon the innocent dead!*"

"True, my son! My heart echoes your noble words! The colonel shall have his answer."

"If you please," said the colonel, very gently but gravely.

The Lord of the Isle turned in his chair, facing his visitor.

"Naturally, Colonel Gibson," he said, "I have a very strong suspicion *who* the offender is. But this suspicion is less than an hour old, and I would have gladly made sundry investigations before sharing it with you. As the matter stands, however, I have resolved to answer your question in all frankness. If I have hesitated a moment as to my duty in the premises, you will at least comprehend that hesitation when you learn of the intimate relationship existing between me and the man who has wrought all this evil. In a word, Colonel Gibson, I have every reason to believe that the man who has committed all these crimes is *my own brother!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

PETER'S PROJECTS FURTHER DEVELOPED.

CHUCKLING with delight at the imposition he had practiced upon his nephew, by a pretended confession, in the name of the Lord of the Isle, as related in a former chapter, Peter Mapleton took his way to a little old stone house in a retired nook of the island, where he and his guilty associates were in the habit of meeting.

The place was quite untenanted at the moment, and Peter, giving himself admittance with a key, proceeded to a small room which had been appropriated exclusively to his own use, and made a complete change in his clothes and personal aspect, getting into a new and fashionable suit, and making a free use of paints and powders.

Such a change, in fact, that it is doubtful if his most intimate friend would have known him under these elaborate disguisements.

Satisfying himself, by a few critical glances at his reflection in a mirror, that he had got himself up to pass for a stranger to the island, or even for a distinguished foreigner, in case he should desire to carry his masquerading to that point, he extinguished his light and took his

way to the door, taking away with him his discarded garments.

"Good-by, Peter," he muttered, mockingly. "You've been cutting up rusty for several years, and it's high time you were buried beyond all possibility of resurrection. Wilt run away, drown yourself, or be killed by some prowling enemy? Let every one decide for himself which of these fates, or what other fate, has overtaken you! The only real point involved in the matter is for you to disappear temporarily from these shores and waters, and leave that brother of yours to answer for your deeds and pay the expenses of your journey."

As he indulged in this soliloquy, he took his way toward the end of the island, as if by an impulse purely mechanical, walking onward swiftly and in silence.

How busy his thoughts were, how absorbing, could have been learned from his inattention to everything around him.

"It's time to go," he resumed. "I've done all I could to get Harmon into trouble—to entangle him in a mesh from which there will be no escape! The money for these bonds and for that mortgage is where I can put hands upon it. The bloodhounds of the law are already here, or will be here in the course of the night, and to their tender mercies I must leave him. Later, when he has paid the penalty of—of the reputation I have given him, I'll return from my travels, get rid of that nephew, and settle down to a new career as the Lord of the Isle!"

In due course he reached the edge of the water, at the head of a small bay which was regarded as the best landing-place on the southern half of the island, and disposed of his discarded garments.

"It's time the yacht were here," he ejaculated, rousing himself from his reverie. "I am anxious to make my connections with her, and have her at my disposal."

As he stood scanning eagerly the waters before him, a bank of dense fog drifted away to the leeward, disclosing somewhat abruptly the very object he was seeking.

It was a small steam-yacht of beautiful model and great speed which lay at anchor a dozen rods from the beach.

"There she is," he muttered, his face brightening.

Walking along the beach a short distance, he came to a small boat, of which he took possession, rowing noiselessly off toward the yacht in question.

As he neared it, he became aware that his movements were being followed attentively by a man crouching behind the low bulwarks of the yacht, near the stern.

"Is this the *Una*?" asked Peter abruptly, suspending the movements of his oars.

"It is, sir."

"How long have you been here?"

"A few minutes only."

"Direct from Chicago?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you leave?"

"At seven o'clock last evening."

"A quick run. The *Una* seems to be all she was represented. I wish to see Captain Klingman."

"I am Captain Klingman. And you, sir—if I may be so bold—"

"I am your consignee—Mr. Wilkie."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Wilkie," said Captain Klingman, arising and inclining his tall figure very respectfully. "Will you come aboard?"

"Of course. Where are your men?"

"They're all in their quarters, pursuant to the orders I have given them. I received a hint from Peabody & Miller to arrive as quietly as possible, and that is the reason why I am showing no light."

"Quite correct, captain," declared Peter as he tossed his painter to the captain and made his way over the side of the yacht, with the aid of the friendly hand offered him. "I am very glad to see you again, Captain Klingman," and he extended his hand. "Your relations with Peabody & Miller and every one else have remained pleasant up to the moment of your departure?"

"Perfectly pleasant, Mr. Wilkie," assured the captain, without remarking, in the darkness, the keen interest of his employer in his answer. "Come into the cabin, sir. I have taken the precaution to shut the windows of your state-room, so that we can have a light without attracting attention. Do you think it is quite safe to leave the *Una* at anchor here, without showing the least hint of her presence?"

"Oh, yes—at least there is no particular danger in suppressing all lights," answered Peter.

"The fact is, she is anchored at a point no craft of any size is likely to visit. How long has it been since you were here, captain?"

"Some four or five years, sir."

"Then I must say your knowledge of these shores and waters is all you claimed it to be."

"Naturally enough, seeing that my whole life has been passed, both as man and boy, between Chicago and Detroit. But come in, sir."

The two men were soon seated in the owner's room, with a bottle of champagne between them, and the rays of several candles illuminating their proceedings.

Captain Klingman was scarcely more than thirty years of age, tall, straight and handsome, with a pleasant air of mingled geniality and command, as was natural to a man who had been more than ten years one of the most popular sailing-masters upon the lakes.

He was married, with a family, and the possessor of a good name, having a wide acquaintance with many of the leading magnates of Chicago and adjacent cities.

As is more or less apparent from the preceding conversation, Peter Mapleton had purchased the *Una* a month before in Chicago, in his character of Mr. Wilkie, and had at the same time engaged Captain Klingman to bring her down to him as soon as certain changes and repairs in her machinery had been effected.

It had also been arranged that Captain Klingman, in his capacity of sailing-master, should in due course take the *Una* down the lakes, and possibly to the West Indies or Europe, for the coming winter.

"Of course you have shipped a complete crew, and are all ready to pull out in any desired direction?" observed Peter, as he filled up the glass of his sailing-master.

"I have, Mr. Wilkie," answered Klingman, producing a bundle of bills, receipts and other papers from his pocket. "Here is a list of their names, with their wages, and a number of other documents you will please look over at your convenience."

"You left no clew to your destination?" continued Peter, as he began sipping his wine with assumed carelessness.

"No, sir, beyond telling the custom-house people, as I was obliged to do, that I was bound on a pleasure cruise down the lake. I have constantly borne in mind your suggestions about secrecy and reserve."

"For which I will now give you some of my reasons," said Peter. "While in Chicago I asked you to identify a certain Harmon Mapleton, so that he could get a check cashed—"

"I remember the transaction, sir."

"Well, I soon discovered that there was something irregular in the transaction or that the said Mapleton had some fraudulent design—I do not know exactly what—and this circumstance made me regret that we had assumed any responsibility in the premises. If called to account by Peabody & Miller for your identification, you will of course mention the name of your owner, but I think our coming absence will meet any and every contingency that may grow out of the matter."

Captain Klingman looked a little disturbed.

"All I can say, Mr. Wilkie, if questioned," he declared, "is that my identification of the man was made by your direction and upon your responsibility."

"Yes, that's about the size of it," admitted Peter. "But we will not make any avowal of this sort until we are driven to it. It is a still tongue that makes a wise head!"

"Oh, of course," said Klingman. "I don't know that we are called upon to go out of our course to fight the battles of our neighbors."

"A good view to take, captain. Here's to your health upon it."

The two men touched glasses, and proceeded to do justice to the sparkling liquid, while quietly giving their attention to a number of bills and measures which had grown out of putting the yacht into commission.

"And now to the future, captain Klingman," remarked Peter, as he proceeded to open a second bottle. "I have a few boxes and parcels to bring aboard the yacht, and shall probably attend to this matter in the course of the next hour or two. You had better keep an engineer and fireman on duty, with orders to keep a fire under the boiler as near to the steaming point as possible. We shall leave the island in the course of the night. I cannot yet say at just what hour. The essential is that you keep ready to start at any moment."

A few further observations were exchanged while the two men were finishing their second bottle of wine, and Peter then led the way to the deck.

"We shall have a squall before morning, I think," he remarked, as he scanned the lowering heavens and the fog upon the surface of the water.

"Yes, during the night or later," confirmed the sailing-master. "If the wind, even such as it is, should shift to the southward, I'd prefer not to be anchored just where we are, sir."

"I'll bear the suggestion in mind, captain, and not keep you here too long," replied Peter. "I'll soon be back again. In the mean time, keep as quiet as possible."

And with this he returned to his boat, of which he took possession with the ease and dexterity of an old sailor, and rowed swiftly to the beach with an air of busy preoccupation.

"Just in time!" he muttered, as he effected a landing and looked back at the yacht. "I would not have failed to have her here at this moment for a great deal of money. Molly and I'll be aboard with our plunder in the course of another hour, and long before morning he conspicuous for our absence. I realize, keenly enough, that I'm beginning to get nervous. It's time to be off!"

CHAPTER XXII.

PETER'S CHANGE OF BASE.

TAKING the most direct route, which was wholly deserted, Peter hastened homeward, still busy with his thoughts.

Once in sight of his cottage, he came to a halt in the edge of a grove, watching and listening.

This was one of the precautions he was in the habit of taking upon his return from his expeditions.

Seeing nothing suspicious, and hearing no one, he drew around his figure a long black cloak which he produced from a secret crevice amid some rocks, and resumed progress rapidly, directing his steps toward the door of his cellar.

How watchful he was need not be stated.

Any one intruding upon him at that moment would have been likely to receive a bullet at sight.

Once at the entrance of the cellar, he drew a key from his pocket and gave himself admittance, locking the door behind him.

From the cellar he took his way up-stairs, proceeding to the room in which he was in the habit of figuring as a paralytic.

To his surprise as well as annoyance, he found his wife fast asleep.

He awakened her somewhat rudely and impatiently.

"Is that the way you watch for the enemy?" he demanded. "Some one, even Harmon himself, may have slipped in here while you've been asleep and discovered my absence."

"No danger of that," returned Mrs. Mapleton, as she scanned the doors and windows. "Everything is fast—just as I left it. There's no need to be nervous. I—I took a drop of brandy to steady my nerves, and I presume that is the cause of my nap."

"Well, I hope you will not be long in getting wide awake," said Peter. "The Una has arrived, as expected, and the sooner we transfer ourselves to her the better. As you see," and he threw open a moment the long black cloak in which he had enveloped himself, "I have already assumed the garb which becomes Mr. Wilkie, and have dropped the name and role of the unfortunate paralytic brother of Harmon Mapleton until further advice!"

"I'm glad of that, Peter," said the wife, with more feeling than she was in the habit of exhibiting, "and I shall be glad to have a somewhat prolonged change of air. Of course our flight will be discovered at an early hour of the morning, or sooner, and this discovery will throw a doubt upon your paralysis, and make a thousand suggestions more or less to our disadvantage."

"Not at all, Molly," returned Peter, as he drew a letter from his pocket and laid it on the mantle-piece, in a position where it would readily be seen by any one entering the apartment. "Here is a letter to Harmon which will prevent him from even thinking that I have ceased to be a paralytic!"

"How can that be?"

"Why, I simply mention that a wealthy English gentleman, who happens to be going down the lake, in his private yacht, has offered to take me to a medical friend in Chicago who can doubtless cure me."

"But the suddenness of your departure?"

"That is explained by the threatening state of the weather, which causes my English gentleman to get away from the island as soon as possible."

"But our failure to say good-by to Harmon and his ward?"

"Is all accounted for by the lateness of the hour, and by our natural hesitation to rout them out of their beds!"

"I see!" commented Mrs. Mapleton, with a sigh of relief. "There is very little that you lose sight of, when you set out to pull the wool over anybody's eyes! I only hope that we shall be as successful in this case as in all others."

"He shall be, no doubt. But I am frank enough to say that we are not taking this step a moment too soon. I'm nearly as nervous as yourself. Paul has not only arrived, but I met him face to face, as he was taking his way almost at a run toward the paternal mansion!"

"And he knew you, despite your disguise?" cried the wife, with a scared look.

"No, I escaped detection in the strangest way possible," and Peter chuckled anew at the bold imposition he had practiced. "You'd never guess how, and so I must explain. I rushed into his arms, as his own dear papa, and he actually recognized me as such—he did indeed!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. I took him in completely. What's more to the point, I made a pretended confession, and gave him such a shock, in the name of Harmon, that I should not be at all surprised to learn later that he has turned his back upon the island forever, and set out for some distant wilderness, where he can bury his disgrace forever."

He laughed anew at the proceeding, but his wife was far from sharing his merriment.

"Of course, if you came unexpectedly upon him, while you were disguised to resemble Harmon," she declared, "perhaps you could not have taken any better course than to pretend to

be his father. But you should have said as little as you could, and got away as soon as possible. My fear is that he will rally from the shock of your pretended confession. He may even have arrived at a full conception of your imposture within five minutes after he met his father!"

Peter looked serious a moment at these suggestions—even troubled.

"Well, the worst is always as possible as the best, in all earthly affairs," he declared. "All any one can do is to do the best they can, in any given circumstances, and guard themselves as fully as possible from all possible failures and short-comings. After what you have said, I am doubly glad that I was thoughtful enough, a month ago, to prepare the way for our departure. Have you packed up the clothes you are going to take with you?"

"Everything I need, although I shall not take a great deal," replied Mrs. Mapleton. "I remembered that I must be my own porter, as you will have the trunk to carry, and I did not care to make a pack-horse of myself. If your arrangements are all made to go aboard of the Una, let's move promptly."

"All right, Molly. I'm as anxious to be off as yourself. While you shake out that 'dummy,' so that it will not betray us, I'll just take a look at our surroundings, to see that no one is playing the spy upon us, and we'll vanish!"

He took a turn around the house, proceeding as far as the water on one hand and the wooded crest on the other, but not the least sight or sound presented itself to render him uneasy or suspicious.

He returned to his wife in excellent spirits.

"The way is open," he said, as he drew a sole-leather trunk from under the bed where he had passed so many months as a helpless paralytic, "and I must say that I am very glad to avail myself of it. I cannot tell you how hard it has been for me to lie here all summer, from morning to night, with only such few diversions as this *Glim* business has afforded me. I'd not carry on this game another year for all there is in the world. I couldn't, in fact. I should go mad or become paralytic in less than a month!"

"Fortunately it is all over," said the wife, with another sigh, as she passed out a valise to the front steps, "and I hope the results will meet your expectations!"

"Certain it is," returned Peter, as he passed out the trunk, "that we have made a haul which will suffice for the remainder of our days. Do not forget for an instant that there are a hundred and eighty thousand dollars in cash in this trunk, and that we are not to lose sight of it until it is deposited where we can find it. I do not think there is any necessity of locking the door behind us. Paul or Harmon will be here as early as any one in the morning. Better leave the key in the lock."

Mrs. Mapleton assented to the suggestion, and in another moment, shouldering the trunk and valise, the couple had turned their backs upon the cottage which had so long sheltered them and their nefarious secrets.

"It is forever," said Peter. "When we return, which will be after Harmon is gone, we shall take up our abode at the villa!"

"Unless Paul should be there!"

"I'll take good care that he does not come between us and our prize," said Peter, with dogged resolution. "After what we have already accomplished, it will be a very easy matter to get rid of him!"

Mrs. Mapleton accepted this view of the situation, and dismissed the last shadow from her face, as if the triumphs of the present were a sufficient guarantee of the successes of the future.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAREWELL REFLECTIONS AND PROCEEDINGS.

As Peter Mapleton walked along the lonely beach, with his wife by his side, he naturally passed in review various features of the situation.

"Did you get rid of that dummy?" he suddenly asked, with a start.

"I did. I took good care to grind the mask in pieces under my heel, so that no idea can be formed from it as to the person it was designed to represent. I even put the pieces into the stove."

"An essential precaution, Molly, since the discovery of the dummy would be almost equivalent to a discovery of our secret. The clothes, too—"

"The clothes I hung up in the wardrobe. There was no necessity of taking any other course with them."

Peter continued his reflections.

So far as he could recall, there was not the least object at the cottage which could even hint at the three long years of masquerading in which he had figured so successfully.

"Of course," he said, speaking rather to himself than to his wife, "there are a number of my associates who know that I, and not Harmon, am the leader in all this *Glim* business. Corry is one of these. On the other hand, there are

several persons in the gang—and Nicholas Collins is one of them—who really believe that the Lord of the Isle is their leader. These latter must all be left here, to give their testimony against Harmon, while the former, so far as is practicable, should be treated to a change of air."

"If there is no easier way of securing their silence, Peter."

The remark did not cause the husband to even bestow a glance of inquiry upon his wife.

He knew her remorselessness of old.

She had never shrunk from decisive measures.

As is so often the case with bad women, she was very bad indeed.

It was owing to her investigations, even more than to his innate wickedness, that Peter had carried out the plot of three years before with such a high and unshrinking hand.

Her present suggestion was not lost upon her husband, although he did not make any immediate or direct reply to it.

His sense of personal safety and security having been duly satisfied by his reflections, he turned his thoughts upon others, and especially upon Dorie.

With what intensity will readily be comprehended, after what we have seen of his sentiments in this connection.

How hard it was to leave her behind him!

What a misfortune it seemed, too, that he was even ignorant of her whereabouts and of what had befallen her!

Might she not have returned?

Could anything be more likely than that the return of Paul had in some way led to her own appearance at the mansion?

In that case, might there not be still time enough for him to get her into his hands and make her a companion of his travels?

What would he not do to achieve such a desirable result!

What risks would he not run to effect her capture!

He could wish, to be sure, that he had a sailing-master with a character quite the contrary of that of Captain Klingman.

There was, in fact, a great gulf between the two men, and one that might at any given moment prove impassable.

Captain Klingman had become the sailing-master of the Una not because of any guilty knowledge of the schemes of its owner, or of any sympathy with evil, but because he happened to be out of a situation and because he supposed "Mr. Wilkie" to be a well-known gentleman of that name of whom he had heard a great deal of good.

As Peter continued to walk on beside his wife, and to turn these things over in his mind, it occurred to him that he could probably arrange to find a substitute for the worthy captain.

There were some of his associates who were as competent to handle the Una—now that she had been delivered to him—as even Captain Klingman.

At least they were capable of taking good care of her on any of the lakes or the St. Lawrence, which was quite enough for present consideration.

Such was notably the case with Gridley, who could find a good mate in Rossbrook, who had become known as his "inseparable."

Another thing, if he were to take these men away with him, he could count upon their silence and fidelity.

They would not even have a chance to betray him.

These reflections brought him to Corry, the keeper of the island light.

Of Corry he had well-defined apprehensions.

In his career of wickedness, he had remarked that there are two classes of villains.

Those who get weary of evil doing and those who daily and hourly get more and more hardened in it.

Corry belonged to the former class, while Gridley and Rossbrook belonged to the latter.

Clearly enough, the light-keeper was a dangerous man to leave behind.

The remorse he had already shown might easily prove the beginning of a general confession.

But it would be equally dangerous to take him away in the Una, as he was not the sort of man to be useful or safe in any of the probable and natural contingencies of the future.

The only action to be taken in his case was to get rid of him immediately and as effectively as possible.

Upon the whole, it would be wise to look after these various associates, and take such action in each individual case as the necessities of the situation demanded.

And while looking after them, he might also obtain possession of Dorie.

Such was the substance of Peter's reflections, in a tenth of the time it has taken us to record them, and he was still in one of the loneliest nooks presented by the island when he reached a resolve to take sundry steps in the sense indicated.

There was still time for these measures.

He could see no reasons why he should not adjourn his departure in the Una at least an

hour, if he found such a delay necessary for the work he was resolved to accomplish.

"You must be tired, Molly," he said, coming to a halt suddenly, and placing upon the ground the trunk he had been carrying. "Here is a safe place to rest a moment, in the midst of these trees and rocks."

Mrs. Mapleton did not need a second suggestion of this nature.

She deposited the valise at her feet and seated herself wearily upon the trunk.

"I think I'll go and see Corry," pursued the husband. "As you see, we are scarcely a hundred yards from the light. I shall not go beyond your hearing. You will not mind being alone a moment?"

"Of course not."

"You have your revolver?"

The woman nodded assent.

She was never without it.

"But why see Corry?" she asked.

"I think he's dangerous, and that it will not be difficult for me to effect a change in this respect."

"Go, then, but keep an ear turned in this direction. I will fire a shot if any one intrudes and I need you."

"In that case, do not waste your shot, Molly, but let it count one!"

With this, the husband vanished.

He was gone a little longer than Mrs. Mapleton expected, and she was even beginning to feel uneasy about his absence, when he came striding back to her.

There was a strange light in his eyes, which she did not fail to notice, by the gleams that streamed into the bushes from the tall tower.

"You saw him?" she demanded.

"Yes. Such a weakling! He was mourning over the probable or possible results of the last 'eclipse,' and worrying himself into a fever at the thought that several persons may have been lost with the three-master. Of course I told him that there has not been a single life lost—which is doubtless the truth, considering the state of the weather. I was not long in getting him into a better state of mind, and in due course proposed a friendly drink. You know his besetting sin, and will not wonder that he accepted. Needless to add that he was quite calm when I left him!"

"I understand," said Mrs. Mapleton.

"Yes, he'll never betray us. I am glad to have got rid of him," and Peter drew a long breath of relief. "And now to get aboard of the Una unseen, and as soon as possible!"

He shouldered his trunk again, and Mrs. Mapleton followed his example, the couple resuming their course toward the little bay where the Una was lying.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERIOUS ACQUAINTANCE.

WHILE these events had been transpiring, some very singular experiences had befallen Dorie Ames, the ward of the Lord of the Isle.

Making the best of the situation in which her abductor had left her, Dorie had exchanged her wet garments for a portion of those found in the hut to which she had been conducted, when she began to be anxious concerning the whereabouts and proceedings of her unwelcome suitor.

She realized only too clearly the actual character of the young reprobate, and was perfectly sure that she had more to fear than to hope from him.

Adding to the fuel on the hearth, and snuffing her candle, she stepped to the door and looked out, listening for some sound indicative of Bunnell's presence.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Ames, at finding that you are not alone here," said a voice, in the midst of some bushes not a dozen yards away. "I will soon prove to you that I am your friend!"

Dorie was too startled for a moment to speak.

"You're the hermit, I suppose?" she then said.

"The hermit?"

"Yes, the old recluse of whom Rufus Bunnell was telling me!"

"I'm afraid that the 'old hermit' has no existence outside of Bunnell's imagination," declared the unknown. "At any rate, I have been here, off and on, for more than a week past, without seeing any other person on the island than Bunnell himself."

"You—you frighten me!" said Dorie.

"Why so?"

"Because you stay hidden, and—and because your voice is so feminine."

"Then I may as well come out of my concealment," returned the unknown. "Only you must not be alarmed if I'm not exactly what you expect me to be. There!"

A lovely girl of Dorie's own age suddenly appeared to her gaze, advancing toward her, with a smiling, pleasant mien, as could be seen by the ray of light streaming through the open doorway upon her.

"Why, you're a girl!" cried Dorie.

"As you see, dear," and the new-comer took her hand gently, gazing admiringly into her face.

"You know who I am, too?"

"Yes, and a great many other things that

will surprise you," acknowledged the fair young stranger, as she placed her arm around Dorie and entered the hut, closing the door behind her.

"Why, you must have been here when I arrived," pursued Dorie, whose amazement was still almost beyond her control.

"I have been here nearly all the time for ten days past," avowed the fair stranger, placing a chair for Dorie's use, and taking possession of another. "I was near the landing-place when you and Rufus Bunnell approached it in his boat—at the very moment, in fact, when he admitted the water into the boat and pretended to you that it had sprung a leak!"

Dorie hesitated in bewilderment.

"You will see from this," added the fair stranger, smilingly, "that you have not been in peril at any time this evening. The boat did not spring a leak, but the water came into it through a number of augur holes Rufus had bored in its bottom. He has been simply playing a game, deceiving you, causing you to regard your cold bath as an accident."

"Well, I thought the whole transaction a little suspicious," avowed Dorie, her heart warming every moment toward the beautiful stranger. "To begin with, it seemed odd that the boat should spring a leak at just the moment when he was so near to the island that he could touch bottom with his feet."

"I see that you understand the affair," returned the maiden's new acquaintance. "It's a simple matter of fact, Rufus did not let the water into the boat until he had seen that he was close to the shore of the island. I heard all his remarks to you—all the exclamations of alarm you uttered. I was concealed on the shore of that little bay where you landed. It is needless to add that I should have come to your rescue if you had really been in any danger."

"What a strange situation!" commented Dorie, giving vent to her relief and joy by throwing her arms around the neck of the unknown girl and kissing her. "How odd that you should be here at such a moment!"

"It is certainly fortunate for you, Dorie," assured her new acquaintance. "But let me tell you who and what I am. My name is Fanny Clymer. I belong in Chicago. As you could never guess what I am doing here, I shall have to tell you my business."

"You needn't tell me, if you would sooner keep your business secret," returned Dorie considerably. "You haven't run away from home?"

Fanny smilingly shook her head, caressing the plump hand of her companion.

"And you are not staying here, in this lonely way, because you are in any personal trouble?"

"Oh, dear—no," and Fanny Clymer shook her head gayly. "Do I look as if I were pining away?" and her merry laugh awoke the echoes of the humble cabin. "I'm just one of the happiest girls in the world—particularly at this moment, when I look into your sweet face, and think how much you are in need of me. That Bunnell, for instance, thinks he has you in his clutches. He flatters himself that you are wholly ignorant of his intentions. He regards you as his prisoner, and he intends to retain you in his hands until you give him a solemn promise to become his wife!"

These declarations merely gave expression to Dorie's fears, and she did not for a moment doubt them, as much as she wondered how Fanny could be so well posted in regard to the relations of the young reprobate to her.

"Where is Bunnell now?" she asked, looking nervously around and listening. "Somewhere on the island, I suppose?"

"No, dear. As soon as he left you, he drew his boat out of the water, plugged up the holes in it, emptied out the water, launched the craft, set a sail he had in readiness, and started for Mapleton Island. He has gone to see your guardian, and to ask him for your hand in marriage!"

Again Dorie was lost in amazement, not merely at the conduct of her unwelcome suitor, but at Fanny's knowledge of all he was doing.

"You surprise me more and more with every word you say," cried Dorie. "How can you know so well the very intentions of Bunnell?"

"I have been watching him a great deal of the time, ever since I have been an occupant of this island," explained Fanny, "and his proceedings have afforded me much amusement and information. No bird was ever busier in fitting up a nest for a mate than he has been in fitting up this hut for your occupancy. You should have seen him going and coming, bringing provisions, clothing, furniture, and other things—in a word, everything you see around you!"

Dorie could not help laughing at the picture these words presented to her mind.

"How to get hold of you," resumed Fanny, has been the fellow's one great preoccupation. Sometimes he thought of violence, sometimes of strategy. The letters he has written to you during the past week, only to suppress them, are scores in number. Some of them are pleading, others threatening, but all of them are burning declarations of his passion. I have saved specimens of them, and here they are."

Dorie found these epistles very entertaining, as she and her new friend looked them over together.

"Of course there is a funny side to the young man's infatuation," observed Fanny, "but these letters none the less attest that Bunnell is very serious in his attentions, and that he should be marked, like so many of the sheals and ledges among these islands, as 'dangerous.' This fact must not be lost sight of."

"And so you've been sharing this island with him, without his knowledge, for more than a week!" exclaimed Dorie. "How very singular! I do not see how you have managed to escape his notice."

"It has indeed been difficult, and I've had several narrow escapes, but I have succeeded in keeping him wholly ignorant of my presence. The truth is, his constant comings and goings have made our joint occupancy of the island a sort of Box and Cox affair!"

"What if he had seen you?"

"It would have put an end to his dreams! He would have found himself adrift on the instant. I should have cleared him out!"

Dorie could not help laughing at the smiling vigor with which Fanny uttered this declaration.

"You would have remained, then, in any case?"

"I would."

"Your business here must be pressing?"

"It is. I have been sent down here by Colonel Gibson, the Chief of Police of Chicago!"

Dorie started, looking as troubled as curious. "To investigate a very important and intricate case," pursued Fanny.

"What! a female detective!" cried Dorie, with a sudden flash of excitement.

"That's what they'd call me in a novel, I presume," pursued Fanny, "and I judge from the expression of your countenance at this moment, that your first impressions might not be favorable to such a character. Nevertheless, there are moments when a female detective has advantages over all others. Are you aware that your guardian has been widely accused of being the leader of the wreckers who have been showing false lights hereabouts for several years past?"

"I am," answered Dorie. "He told me so to-night."

"And yet he is innocent, Dorie!"

"As innocent as you or I, Fanny."

"And it is to clear up his good name and prove his innocence, Dorie, that I have entered upon the weird and dangerous and toilsome life you find me living, Dorie! Is that such a wicked and unwomanly thing to do?"

Dorie's heart was touched to the quick.

"Forgive me!" she cried, bursting into tears, and throwing her arms around Fanny's neck. "An angel from heaven could not be engaged in a holier mission! Forgive me, darling!"

"I forgive you, dear. But you see from this that there are detectives and detectives. There are some who have no higher aim than to prey on the sins and shames of mankind, but there are others who never lose sight of the good they can do by righting wrong and exposing evil!"

"And you are one of the latter," murmured Dorie, kissing her companion with tenderness and gratitude. "I shall always love you!"

"I have certainly entered upon this task with the best and purest of aims," affirmed Fanny, returning Dorie's caresses. "I want to see the name of your guardian freed from the clouds resting upon it. I want to see you freed from the sorrow and anxiety these false accusations are causing you."

"Darling Fanny," and Dorie caressed her new acquaintance again with feverish earnestness. "I could not think more of you than I do if you were an angel. Poor guardy! Oh! how glad I shall be if you can prove his innocence!"

"And Paul, too! How happy Paul will be if his father's innocence can be made manifest!"

"Ah! you know about Paul!" and Dorie's face lighted up with the rarest radiance.

"Yes, darling! I know what a warm heart he will find here on his arrival to-night or to-morrow!"

"Why do you say to-night, Fanny?" queried Dorie with breathless eagerness.

"Because I hope he will come down the lake with Colonel Gibson, and I expect the colonel to-night, in a steamer chartered especially for the voyage!"

"Oh, joy! joy! But what have you learned in guardy's case, Fanny? Anything to prove his innocence?"

"A great deal, dear. To begin with, I have discovered that there is a man acting in the name of the Lord of the Isle and disguised to resemble him—a daring and terrible impostor! I have seen this miscreant on the lawn when your guardian was in the house, and in the house when your guardian was out of doors! In other words, your guardian has an awful double, a deadly enemy, who is seeking to ruin him!"

"Oh! if you could only discover who he is!"

"That is something I know already!"

"You do? Who is he?"

"Your guardian's brother!"

"What! Peter Mapleton?"

"Yes, Peter Mapleton!"

"That paralytic!"

"He's no more a paralytic than you are, my dear Dorie!" assured Fanny Clymer, her eyes moistening with glad tears at the look of joy and relief she saw stealing over the face of her companion. "Peter Mapleton is a fraud of the worst description. He never had a stroke of paralysis—never! He has never been helpless and bed-ridden! He has always been as stout and robust as any wolf of the forest—and as dangerous! I have watched him as he came out of his cottage and went forth upon his nefarious errands, and I have watched him as he returned to his home and wife, after his dreadful work has been accomplished!"

"Oh, Fanny! darling Fanny!"

It was all Dorie Ames could say in that moment of gladness, as she lay all flushed and radiant, in the gentle arms which had stolen about her lithe and graceful figure.

"And of course you will tell Colonel Gibson what you have learned," cried Dorie, as soon as she could find her voice.

"Yes, I shall tell him. It has been arranged that Colonel Gibson will be at Mapleton Island in the course of to-night, and that I will see him!"

"Oh, how nice that all is!" exclaimed Dorie. "Would that we had a boat, so that I could start for home this very minute!"

"We have one, dear!"

"You have?"

"Yes, a splendid canoe—one in the style of those birch-bark canoes with curved ends, which are so common at Mackinaw Island!"

"Really? How delightful! Where is it?"

"Hidden under the bushes which overhang a little creek not a dozen rods from us."

"Oh, how delightful! Let us start for home immediately."

The maiden sprung to her feet, her face flushing awash with her wild joy, and her eyes dancing with the eagerness and warmth of her emotions.

"We will go soon," returned Fanny. "But I think we had better wait for the return of Bunnell. It is perfectly certain that your guardian will not assent to his demand for your hand, and in this case Rufus is likely to come back here with the intention of retaining you in a miserable captivity for the rest of your days, even if he has to carry you off to the depths of some Canadian wilderness."

"True, Fanny. Such is doubtless the mood in which he will return," said Dorie, nervously. "Let us fly before he has time to get back!"

"Do not be alarmed, dear," said Fanny, as calm as ever. "The return of Rufus Bunnell need not cause you the least uneasiness or apprehension. I have no hesitation in saying that I will protect you from him. In a general way, I am in possession of all his schemes and intentions, and shall be able to apply the proper control to him and them at any desired moment. It is possible that your guardian may be so angry at Bunnell's conduct that he will seize him, binding him hand and foot, and make your restoration a *sine qua non* for the rascal's release. Or he may let the villain return hither and take measures to follow him. Be all this as it may, we had better wait here long enough to give him a chance to return. I'd like very well to hear his report to you, and get a further insight into his plans and intentions. By taking this course, we may get hold of some very precious avowals."

"That is true, Fanny," returned Dorie, thoughtfully. "We may get hold of some secret that will be of great benefit to guardy. You will remember that he speaks in one of those discarded, threatening letters about being the 'possessor of his terrible secret.' We will wait, if you are quite sure that we shall be able to make our escape from him at any desired moment."

"I vouch for that, Dorie. You need not have the least fear of him."

"It is agreed, then," said Dorie. "At the worst, it will be a treat to hear his report, and see his surprise when he finds that you are present."

CHAPTER XXV.

BUNNELL'S WOOING.

AN hour passed quickly, while the girls had an appetizing supper, from the stores at their disposal, and discussed their plans and the various features of the situation.

"It's now about time to place ourselves on the lookout for the return of Bunnell," at length said Fanny Clymer, as she looked at her watch. "It will not do to let him steal a march upon us."

Putting more fuel on the fire, and lighting an extra candle, so as to have a good view of the unwelcome suitor, if he should appear, as expected, the girls took their way out of the hut, after huddling themselves up warmly, and closed the door behind them.

How dark the night had become!

What a rude blast, too, was that which saluted them, blowing their curls and garments about, and bringing over the entire island a

mist that was almost the equivalent of a shower of rain!

A single light only was visible, that upon Mapleton Island, and even this was obscured the most of the time, its rays appearing only in occasional fitful flashes.

The fog was everywhere intense, and nowhere more heavy than on the island.

"What a wild night!" exclaimed Dorie, as she seized the arm of her companion. "I never saw one that seemed so gloomy!"

"That's because you never before found yourself in such an exposed situation, at such an hour," returned Fanny. "I don't regard this as any gale at all. I've often been out in much worse weather."

Arm in arm, the couple took their way to the beach at the point where Dorie had landed after being plunged into the water.

This beach being sheltered from the wind, the scene around Dorie did not seem so disagreeable or tempestuous after she had become accustomed to it.

Resigning herself to the guidance of Fanny, Dorie was conducted to a little bush hut that her new acquaintance had built in Bunnell's absence, by at least two days of incessant labor.

It was barely large enough to shelter one or two persons, but it was far more comfortable than a casual observer would have believed possible.

Its walls were dense enough to break the force of even such a wind as was now raging, and it would have doubtless withstood a rain of a day's duration, so great was the care with which Dorie had thatched it.

It only remains to be added that this hut had been so cleverly dissembled in a thicket of young trees, chiefly evergreens, that any one might have passed within a rod of it in the daytime without detecting its presence.

Seating themselves upon a rustic bench Fanny had elaborated just within the hut, the girls peered out through the small opening which served as a doorway, and watched and listened.

"And this has been your abode for more than a week?" murmured Dorie, in a tone expressive of the deepest admiration.

"Yes, and I must say that I have never slept better," replied Fanny. "You must remember, however, that the present night is hardly a sample of those by which it has been preceded."

An interval of silence succeeded, during which the girls continued to watch the surface of the waters in the direction of Mapleton Island, and to listen to the roar of the elements.

"It is on such nights as this that the *Flying Glim* appears," remarked Dorie, when the silence had become oppressive.

"True, but it is doubtful if it will ever appear again," returned Fanny. "Peter Mapleton, as the head of that fiendish brotherhood, is too well informed not to know that his acts are receiving attention from detectives and others, both here and in Chicago, and he may have already stayed his murderous hand! But listen! I thought I heard the creaking of oars!"

Both listened intently.

The sound Fanny had heard was soon repeated.

"Yes, there it is again," murmured the girl detective, joyfully. "Bunnell is coming!"

Another brief interval of listening sufficed to verify the fact completely, the creaking of a pair of oars being more plainly heard every moment, until it became constant.

"I will meet him as he lands," whispered Dorie, as she stole out of the hut.

"And I will precede you, as you return with him, to the cosy fire we have left," returned Fanny. "Do not have the least anxiety in regard to him. I shall be within sight and hearing, and will apply the ruler to his knuckles whenever he may need it."

It was not long before a dark speck appeared on the water, advancing toward the watchers, one of whom stood erect on the beach, while the other remained in concealment.

This dark speck soon developed into the outlines of Bunnell and his boat.

As he reached the beach and sprung out, drawing his boat out of the water, Dorie presented herself to his gaze.

"You've been gone a long time," she said, with a mien and voice suggestive of impatience. "I thought you were coming back in half an hour!"

"The boat was carried a long distance to the leeward by the wind and currents!"

"Indeed!"

"And I had a very long and dangerous swim to find it in this darkness!"

"I should think as much! And what of the holes in it?"

"I—I've plugged 'em up!"

"Will you tell me how? I'd like to know the process!"

"Why, with wooden plugs!"

"And where?"

"At another island like this one, which lies away here to the northward."

"It must have been a wonderful operation," said Dorie, in the same mocking and incredulous tone she had previously used. "Let me see how the job has been accomplished."

"See? In this darkness?"

"You can light a match."

"I haven't any."

"Well, I have. Let me show you how useful and handy they are."

Even as she spoke, she struck a match which seemed to have been expressly designed for use in such a state of the weather, for it burned all the better under the breath of the half gale that was blowing.

"There!" she added, flashing the rays of the match into the boat. "Funny! very funny, is it not, Rufus Bunnell?"

"What is funny?"

"Why, that your boat should have sprung a leak in the shape of six two-inch auger-holes!"

"What do you mean, Miss Dorie?"

"Simply that your falsehoods and frauds are now perfectly transparent. But I can talk to you no longer here. Come to the house!"

"I will come," returned Bunnell, "but not till I have put it out of your power to make any immediate use of this boat."

"How so?"

"I'll remove three or four of the plugs to which you have called attention."

He suited his actions to his words.

"All right," said Dorie, as she turned away, and led the way toward the hut to which Bunnell had previously escorted her. "I have no use whatever for your boat!"

Nothing more was said until the hut was reached, but Dorie did not fail to notice that Fanny flitted on ahead of her and entered the humble dwelling, concealing herself in the pantry.

"Sit down, Mr. Bunnell," said Dorie, as she closed the door behind her, "and we'll finish our conversation. You have been to see my guardian, and it is possible that he or Paul may have followed you to this abode. In the hope that such may be the case I will put a light in the window to guide the pursuer."

Bunnell started violently twice in rapid succession at this reception—once when he was accused of visiting the Lord of the Isle, and again when one of the candles was utilized in the sense indicated.

Then he stared at Dorie in a hard sort of way, as if he could not quite make her out, and was at a loss to decide just what course to take with her.

"You need not deny that you have been to the island since you left me," pursued the maiden, as she extended her hands to the cheerful blaze on the hearth. "You have had ample time to go and come, notwithstanding the unpleasant state of the weather, even if you have not ventured to use your sail. It did not take you five minutes to find my boat and prepare it for your voyage. You see from these observations how little I am the dupe of your 'accident.' I am fully aware of the scheme which has induced you to fit up this hut for my use. What did guardy say to you?"

Bunnell was slow to respond.

He had turned all sorts of colors, while listening to Dorie's remarks, but he wisely decided not to make any further attempts to impose upon her.

"Well, I confess it," he declared. "There was no 'accident' involved in your arrival here. I brought you to this island as the preliminary step toward making you my wife. It can do no harm to tell you, in a perfectly plain manner, since you seem anxious to force me to it, that you are a prisoner in my hands, and are likely to remain such for a long time to come."

This declaration produced in Dorie's soul a tempest of indignation, and that indignation made her fearless.

"What do you propose to accomplish by this villainous conduct?" she demanded, sternly.

"I shall bring the Lord of the Isle to consent to our union, which will be an important point gained—shall also bring you to the acceptance of my suit, which is still another important consideration."

Dorie uttered a scornful comment.

"You may defy me now," pursued Bunnell, "but my triumph is none the less certain. Would you know why? Listen. Since my return from Chicago, I have been hanging around this neighborhood, especially at night, and very curious have been some of my discoveries. For instance, I have discovered the secret of the *Flying Glim*. I have learned who are the parties concerned in showing the false light, and who is their leader!"

"Then why don't you denounce them, and get a handsome reward for your trouble?"

"Perhaps I shall, and very soon!"

"Go at once, Rufus Bunnell, and make an end of this foolishness about retaining me as a prisoner," said Dorie. "Take me back to the villa and I will not reproach you for anything that has taken place. Tell guardy what you have learned, and he will defend you."

"Oh, no," returned Bunnell. "I would not dare say a word to your guardian about the *Flying Glim*. He is the leader of those terrible assassins!"

Dorie looked at him in silence, with serene and smiling contempt, and he continued:

"And I swear to you, Dorie Ames, that there is only one way of saving him from the gallows. Promise to be my wife, and I will save him for

your sake! Refuse, and he shall die! Refuse, and I will denounce him as the chief of the assassins before you are a day older!"

"You are hardly entitled to a reply to these threats, Mr. Bunnell," returned Dorie, with the same smiling scorn as before. "Nevertheless, I am good-natured enough to declare formally that I laugh at them. I defy you to injure guardly. Your wicked falsehoods will not disturb him any more than they do me!"

"We'll see! Your guardian will hang, if I speak out, of that you can rest assured. But I will not attempt to say to-night all I have to say to you. During the time I have lived here, I have made a hiding-place, in stone and mortar, under the floor, where no one will ever think of looking for you, and there shall be your home till you have changed your tone."

He seized her roughly by the arm, dragging her toward a trap-door in the center of the apartment, but suddenly halted, as he caught sight of Fanny Clymer, who had emerged from her concealment, and was covering him with a revolver.

"Let go of that young lady's arm, Rufus Bunnell, or I shall drop you where you stand," was the stern order of Fanny, and Bunnell complied with as much terror as amazement.

"Now hold out your hands in such a way that I can tie your wrists together."

The young reprobate hesitated, but a sudden movement of the revolver impelled him to a prompt compliance.

"Bind him, Dorie," added Fanny. "Stay, I'll tie that knot myself, while you hold this revolver to his head. I'll secure his hands in such a way that they will not be of any especial service to him for an hour to come. The labor thus imposed upon him will distract his thoughts from the regrets our departure is about to cause him!"

The prisoner was soon bound to Fanny's satisfaction, and she then lighted a lantern and led the way out of the dwelling, without bestowing another glance upon him.

"Our trip to Mapleton Island will not be exactly pleasant, or free from peril," she said, as she closed the door of the hut behind her, "but it is preferable to passing the night here. Take my arm, please."

She led the way to the canoe of which she had spoken, and in a few minutes more the two brave girls had embarked therein, unheeding the fog and the darkness, and even the wild winds that were now raging upon the waters around them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WRECK.

On the deck of the three-masted schooner which had proved the latest victim of the *Flying Glim* two men were walking to and fro, despite the wind and cold, with such hasty and energetic strides as to indicate that they were a prey to the profoundest agitation.

To judge from the resemblance they bore each other, as seen in the light of a lantern hanging to the stump of the mizzen-mast, they were father and son.

Their age, too, was in harmony with this theory, the elder man being at least twice as old as the other.

They were the owners of the vessel and cargo. As to who they were, and the cause of their excitement, we need only listen to their conversation, and witness their proceedings.

"Account for it?" the father was saying. "Account for our getting ashore on this island? I still believe that Captain Harrow has run us ashore on purpose."

"Hush! he will hear you," returned the son. "He's somewhere on the deck, or in the cabin."

"I don't care if he does hear me," declared the father, testily. "If he don't know anything about navigating a vessel, or about the waters he sails upon, why does he call himself a first-class captain and ask for first-class pay?"

"All that is foreign to the situation, father," explained the son. "We are not ashore because of any incompetency on the part of Captain Harrow, but because we have been tricked by a false light—by the *Flying Glim*, in fact—and have been conducted out of our proper course!"

"You think so?"

"I know it. Has not Captain Harrow himself said so, in so many words?"

"What does his declaration amount to? He makes it to excuse himself for his blunders and for his ignorance, or else for his treachery."

"Treachery? Explain yourself, father. What interest has Captain Harrow in casting away the schooner?"

"To steal a march on us," answered the father, lowering his voice. "To begin with, he knows that the schooner was wrecked last summer, and narrowly escaped being condemned. He may even know that our talk of having a valuable cargo aboard of her is a mere pretense, and that it is our design to cheat the underwriters of at least ten thousand dollars. It may have even occurred to him that we intended to cast away the schooner somewhere at the first good opportunity, for the sake of the insurance upon her and upon the cargo."

"Yes, that was my view of the case," said a

gruff voice within a few yards of the speakers, who turned quickly in that direction.

"An eavesdropper, Captain Harrow?" cried the elder of the two owners.

"Not intentionally, Mr. Ryan," was the answer. "But when I hear myself discussed with such disfavor as you have been exhibiting, I consider myself at liberty to inject a word or two edgewise. I did not cast away the schooner on purpose, nor am I an incompetent navigator. Our getting ashore is a pure accident, for which the *Flying Glim* alone is responsible."

"In that case, why don't the wreckers come swarming around us for plunder?"

"They'll be here soon enough, no doubt," declared Captain Harrow. "In the mean time, we had better come to an understanding, not upon a basis of false accusations and absurd suspicions, but upon a basis of facts."

"I am willing," returned the elder Ryan. "Let's hear what you have to say."

"Briefly, then, the facts in the case are as follows," pursued the captain. "After being in business eight years in Chicago, you found yourself getting into financial difficulties. Instead of looking for relief to an ordinary failure or assignment, which necessitates the giving up of all assets, you decided to sell the bulk of your goods for ready cash, pocketing the money, and to get away with the rest of your stock by putting it aboard of a schooner and making a timely voyage down the lakes."

The father and son exchanged significant glances.

Then the former laughed in the dry and mirthless manner of a man who has no such thing as a real laugh in his composition.

"Correct, captain—correct," he acknowledged. "We see that you have had your eyes open."

"And also my ears! I have had no difficulty in gathering these facts, a dozen times over, from the conversation in which you have indulged since we left Chicago. If you have duly comprehended this fact, I'll resume my exposition of the situation. By means of a vast display of crates, barrels and boxes, containing merchandise of very little or no value, you have deluded the underwriters into giving you an insurance of ten thousand dollars upon your cargo, and as much more upon your schooner, with the intention of finding a suitable grave for both at some such spot as the one where we are now lying. Am I not right?"

The Ryans were dumfounded.

Captain Harrow had stated their situation just as well as if they had taken him into their confidence from the very beginning of their nefarious proceedings.

They were at a loss what to say, the standpoint of the captain not having been yet revealed with sufficient clearness to them.

"From these remarks," pursued Harrow, "it is easy to see what a nice harvest you are reaping. Having realized about twenty thousand dollars from your stock of goods, not a yard of which has been paid for, you are now in a fair way to realize as much more upon your vessel and cargo! A very nice game, gentlemen, and one that is only too common in all the countries of the world! As poor a navigator as you may deem me, I have not failed to remark that there are as great sharks ashore as can be found off soundings!"

"That's so, captain," acknowledged the elder Ryan, repeating his mirthless laugh. "But we are not the inventors of the system of money-getting you have so clearly indicated. We simply imitate the example which has been set us. Suppose you take a hand in the game we are playing?"

"Thanks, Mr. Ryan!" returned Harrow. "That's the very point I was coming to. You will of course need the testimony of your captain in regard to the loss of your vessel and cargo. All I demand is a portion of the booty."

"How large a portion?" asked Ryan.

"I shall be satisfied with seven thousand, five hundred dollars. For this sum, in ready cash, I will not only testify in your favor before all the underwriters interested, but I will take good care that my mates and sailors come into court in sufficient numbers to confirm our evidence."

"It's a bargain," declared Ryan, "provided you will take such action with the wreckers as to prevent them from revealing or even discovering the very thin character of our cargo!"

"Oh, that point can be readily managed," returned Harrow. "I will give them half they will save, and of course they will take every dollar's worth of goods out of the schooner. Of this transaction with the *Flying Glim* gang we'll never say the least word to our insurance people, but will let them suppose that every box of our valuable cargo has been carried away by the coming tempest."

"Of course that's the ground to take, captain," said the elder Ryan. "But is there not danger that the wreck will go to pieces before we can communicate with the wreckers?"

"I think not. She lies upon a rocky ledge, to be sure, but in such a way that she neither rolls nor pounds, and she is not likely to do so until the breeze has freshened considerably."

"For one I'd like to be out of her," said the

younger Ryan, as he advanced to the fore-castle and looked at the jagged rocks rising under the schooner's bow and at the watery gap between him and the shore. "I'm getting decidedly uneasy. All the other passengers seem to have landed in safety."

"I can understand your feelings," returned Captain Harrow, "but it's better to wait until the men have built a fire on the shore, and established a line between the stub of the main-mast and one of those trees you can just make out on the point."

"It's a swim I wouldn't like to undertake, without assistance, in this darkness," declared the elder Ryan, as he advanced to the captain's side and looked shoreward. "To be hurled upon one of those pinnacles would be rather worse for the man than for the rock!"

"Patience!" enjoined Harrow. "We'll soon have a rope to assist us in landing. You see how busy the boys are, as well here as on the shore. Not a man has been lost, thus far, although one or two have been severely bruised in landing. I'll get you ashore, gentlemen, as soon as I can undertake the measure safely."

"That's all we can ask," said Ryan, surveying the masts and sails of the schooner, which still lay where they had fallen with the first shock, half upon the rocks and half in the water. "I'd sooner be in the cabin than shivering on the land."

"That's the way I look at it," said Harrow. "It's quite possible that the wreck will not break up before morning."

The Ryans drew a long breath of relief in unison.

"Come into the cabin, captain," then said the elder of the two, "and I will hand you the sum demanded for your services, as well as sufficient money to pay the crew and get them back to Chicago. My son and I do not wish to have any dealings with them."

"Quite right," commented Harrow. "It's perfectly in my line, you know, to do what you wish."

He followed the owners into the cabin, where a couple of lights were burning brightly, and took his accustomed place at the head of the table.

"I suppose the insurance is not in your names," he resumed.

"No, in that of a friend," responded Ryan. "Otherwise—"

"Yes, otherwise your creditors would shut down upon it. They know nothing about your voyage?"

"No, nor are they likely to. All they will discover is that we have left Chicago without leaving any address behind us."

The captain bowed understandingly.

"I see that our way is clear," he said. "We may as well celebrate the circumstance in the best at our disposal."

He addressed a few words to his steward, who had made his appearance, and the two were soon giving a portion of their attention to the contents of a bottle which had evidently roamed about the world a great deal, to judge by the dust and cobwebs which had accumulated upon it.

The financial relations between the captain and his employers had scarcely been placed upon a satisfactory footing, when a loud crash was heard, and the wreck quivered from stem to keel as if in mortal agony.

"She's breaking up," cried Harrow, springing to his feet in surprise and alarm. "She's a very old boat, you know. We must leave her!"

"Breaking her back on the ledge, is she not?" demanded Ryan, as he sprang to his state-room and clutched a small valise he had kept under lock and key.

"Yes, or bursting with the water that has entered her hold," replied Harrow, as another violent snap resounded. "In any case, she's dissolving like a lump of sugar in a cup of tea! We must start quickly, or we shall get into trouble!"

He led the way from the cabin with rapid strides, having previously secured on his person his private papers and all else he cared to save, and the father and son hastened to follow his example.

"Quick! quick!" cried Harrow, as the crash of riven timbers grew louder. "In another minute, it will be too late!"

It was too late already!

A tremendous crash succeeded, as the schooner broke in two amidships, and in another moment Harrow and his owners, with the sailors which had remained aboard, were struggling in the seething abyss of waters!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WRECKERS.

It was not long after Chief Gibson took leave of them to visit the Lord of the Isle, as related, when Captain Bush and his young pilot pushed off with a boat and four men, all armed, to give their attention to the wreck which had been hurled upon the Outer Beaver.

The row past Patsey Reef, and across the intervening waters, was as difficult as disagreeable, but it was at length successfully accomplished, and the boat reached the shelter of a

small point of land near the extremity of the island.

"We had better cover our lanterns until we see what is taking place here," said Captain Bush, as he followed his men ashore. "The rascals who set up the false light on Patsy Reef have had more than half an hour's start, and we shall doubtless find them here in force, so that we must use prudence and caution."

These suggestions were duly acted upon, and the captain and Wally noiselessly gained the sandy ledge which crowns the southern extremity of the Outer Beaver, and concealed themselves under the trees to which allusion has been made, turning their gaze upon the little bay lying between the two forks which form the extreme southern ends of the island.

What a sight was that presented to their scrutiny.

The little bay in question was not merely a scene of destruction and waste, but also of busy plunder, the beach being literally covered with wreckage, not merely of the three-master but of its cargo.

The barrels and boxes scattered about were simply innumerable.

They covered the entire surface of the water for many rods outward, and were being ground together as in a mill at every wave that came rolling in upon them.

Just beyond this crescent of lodged or floating objects had been anchored a large smack, which was being loaded as rapidly as possible.

By the powerful lights in the rigging of this smack, and by the lanterns of half a dozen men stationed at different points along the shore, the observers were able to take in the nature of the scene before them.

The wreckers were at work.

The fire of which Captain Harrow had spoken had at length been kindled, and it had been so liberally fed with wood, that it was now a towering flame, lighting up the scene for a great distance around it.

In front of this fire were crouched several passengers and sailors of the schooner who had been injured in getting ashore, and several others who did not feel under any obligation to tire themselves out in assisting the wreckers.

The tall form of Captain Harrow, with a bandage around his head, could have been seen near the fire, but the Ryans, both father and son, had not been seen since the schooner crumbled beneath them.

Flashing the light of their lanterns here and there, the wreckers passed in rapid review all the objects presented to their gaze.

In the dense fog and gloom, which confined the rays of even their largest lanterns within a narrow radius, the busy toilers could not help looking as sinister as strange.

Upon the young pilot and his companion, the effect was almost as singular as if they had been the sport of some horrible illusion.

"Seel" suddenly breathed Wally.

There was no necessity of saying more.

The eyes of his companion were fixed in the same direction as his own.

One of the wreckers, while searching along the rocks, had found a dead body.

Raising it in his arms, he carried it over the wreckage to a bit of lawn near the fire, where he deposited it upon the grass.

The dead man proved to be the elder Ryan, as Captain Harrow saw at a glance.

In his right hand was still clutched the small valise he carried at the moment of his fatal plunge into the water.

A long cut upon the pale forehead, from which blood was still flowing, indicated that he had been dashed against a rock with such force as to become insensible, and that he had drowned in consequence.

Advancing to the body, Captain Harrow secured the valise and tucked it carelessly under his left arm, and returned to the fire, trying to look as careless as if the proceeding were of no especial importance.

But he was none the less sure that the valise contained a great deal of Ryan's ill-gotten money, perhaps many thousands of dollars.

His act was followed by a sudden commotion, and a second wrecker drew near the fire, with a second body he had drawn from the water.

It proved to be that of the younger Ryan.

The conspiracy of the two men to defraud their creditors had turned out far differently from what they had hoped and expected.

They had gone to their account!

"There are more to come, I think," said the wrecker, who had arrived last. "But there have been fewer losses of life than might have been expected."

Captain Harrow took a good look at the second body, to assure himself that life was extinct.

The result was perfectly satisfactory, and he returned to the fire with a gleam upon his features that would have caused an observer to shudder.

His mind was fully made up to keep the money which had fallen into his clutches.

"Of course," said Captain Bush, after he had fully surveyed the scene before him, "we have made certain arrangements for such a contingency as the discovery of the wreckers, but I

never supposed we should have such an army as this on our hands. There cannot be less than a score of them!"

"And there may be more on the lookout!" suggested Wally. "Either such is the case, or they feel able to defend themselves from any enemy who may put in an appearance."

"That is not quite the state of the case," explained Captain Bush. "They are all at work here as honest men who have come to the rescue, and not as the villains who caused the wreck. Ask any of them about a false light, and they would profess to be as ignorant of any such object as they are of the interior of Australia. They are armed, as you see, but they would claim that they are merely taking precautions against the gang of the *Flying Glim*. So long as they keep the secret of their false light, and their victims perish in the wreck, they have a clear field, and can continue their career without molestation. The bulk of all they save goes to them, of course, especially all such valuables as they can get away with unnoticed, but a small amount of the wreckage will be saved for the owners or underwriters, just for the sake of throwing an air of legality over their proceedings."

The young pilot comprehended.

"In this case," he remarked, "we should have no right to interfere with any of these people, if we had not discovered the secret light."

"Certainly not, and even as it is, it will be a difficult matter to prove the complicity of a single man here with the light in question. We did not see any of the men, or the man, who suppressed the light at the light-house, or any of those parties who set up the *Glim* on Patsy Reef—not a single soul of them. You see how well they manage their affairs, and how safely."

The situation was indeed as the worthy captain had stated.

From the moment the schooner was dashed ashore, it was a work of charity and kindness for any one in the vicinity to assist in saving what they could.

"So true is all this," added Captain Bush, "that I am almost at a loss what course to take. I am inclined to think that we shall learn more by watching these people, without revealing our presence, than we would by offering our services and assisting them in their labors, or by thrusting ourselves into their midst in the name of the law."

Wally shared this view fully.

"What we will do, then," pursued the captain, "is this. We'll arrange to see where the wreckers go and what they do with their plunder."

The young pilot reflected a moment.

"Why not dress ourselves in their style," he then suggested. "By taking this course we can mix in with the wreckers and spy out all their secrets and proceedings."

"I like the idea," returned Captain Bush. "If there is no secret pass-word or signal by which the members of the band recognize each other, the course you suggest may be the best one open to us. Fortunately we have brought along the necessary disguisements. All we have to do is to go back to our boats and get into them."

This measure was soon taken, and the two men returned and resumed their survey of the wreckers, who continued as busy as ever.

As far as the watchers could judge, the smack was already filled with barrels and boxes, and they realized that it would not be long before she would take her departure.

"As busy as they all are," observed Captain Bush, "and in such a gloom as this, we shall doubtless be able to pass as two of their number. Shall we try it—you and I, leaving our four men and the boat where they are?"

"Yes, let's try it," proposed Wally. "Why not make our way aboard the smack and sail away in her to her destination?"

Captain Bush considered the proposition.

"Why not?" he returned. "We can give our men orders to follow the smack, which they can readily do in this darkness. You heard what was said about taking away another cargo to-night? This shows that the hiding-place of these men must be within a few miles!"

The necessary orders were given to the crew of the boat, and the two men then made their way into the midst of the wreckers, joining in their work, and in due course found themselves aboard the smack.

Five minutes thereafter she was getting under way for her destination.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

THERE were about a dozen men on the smack, several of whom had taken their way to the dingy little cabin to enjoy their pipes and a drop of liquor.

Among these latter were Gridley and Ross Brooke, who had so long been in the service of the Lord of the Isle, without ceasing to be active and efficient members of the *Flying Glim* fraternity.

Gridley, in fact, was in charge of the wreck, he having long figured as the leader of the band on all occasions when it did not suit the convenience or pleasure of Peter to be present.

"Have any of you seen Number One to-night?" asked Gridley, as he removed his tumbler from his lips and proceeded to fill it up again from a bottle on the table.

Number One, of course, was another name for Peter Mapleton.

Several voices replied in the negative.

"Perhaps he knew there was nothing on the schooner worth having," suggested a man in one corner of the cabin, in a tone of discontent.

"Or perhaps he does not like to expose his elegant person to the air when the weather is so threatening," said another.

"Or he may be in better business," ventured a third.

Gridley bent a keen glance upon the last speaker—a glance that was half inquiry and half reprobation.

"What do you mean, Jack?" he demanded.

"I mean that none of us—not even you—know just what Number One is doing!"

"That is your opinion, Jack," said Gridley.

"And mine," declared the man in the corner. "I think Number One is beginning to get weak in his hind legs, and that he has his reasons for keeping out of our company so much lately."

"It's only that he's busy," explained Gridley, who felt it all the more incumbent upon him to defend his chief for the reason that he was less satisfied with his conduct than any other member of the band.

"You think so?" sneered the man in the corner, without troubling himself to disguise or palliate his opinions. "Ten to one he is getting ready to run away and leave us in the lurch. If not, why has he made three trips to Chicago in less than a month?"

"Hush, Bob. It's not for us to sit in judgment upon our leader—especially in this public fashion. He may have gone to Chicago to see what measures the enemy are taking. But enough of that sort of remark. Let's take another drink all around, and get back to the deck."

The invitation was accepted, and the entire party left the cabin in silence.

"It is the old story, Ross," said Gridley, as he took Rossbrook by the arm, and walked toward the fore-castle. "We're breaking up! We've ceased to think and act as one man. At the very moment when we ought to be more earnestly united than ever, I find that every one of the nine is anxious to have his own way, and to follow his own views, and to growl at the conduct of all the rest."

"Of all this later," returned Rossbrook, with a keen glance around. "I agree that there are difficulties in our path, but you and I, at least, ought to be able to see our way out!"

The course the smack was steering was such as to render the wind favorable, or it would hardly have been feasible to carry on a conversation on her deck.

As it was, one tossed like a feather, rolling and plunging in a manner which seemed at times to threaten her total disappearance beneath the waters.

All the talk of her crew was of the wild and stormy character of the weather.

The darkness was intense.

A second light had appeared in the distance, almost with the same appearance as that on Mapleton Island, and toward this the smack was steering.

"Evidently," said Wally to Captain Bush, as they clung to the bulwarks amidst ships, "that light is intended to guide the wreckers. It cannot be far from our destination. As we supposed, therefore, the retreat of these men cannot be many miles distant."

"Hark!" returned the captain abruptly, clutching the young pilot's arm.

It was a wild cry of distress, in girlish tones, which had suddenly fallen upon the hearing of those aboard the smack, and which was again and again repeated, as Wally complied with the captain's injunction.

"Help! help! save us!" was the burden of that wild cry.

In an instant all was excitement and confusion aboard the smack, and every eye was turned in the direction from which that cry of distress proceeded.

"Quick! a rocket or two and all the light possible!" cried Gridley, as he sprang into the rigging.

The order was obeyed with a promptness that would have astonished an old man-o-war's man, a noisy, gleamy rocket ascending high into the air, and half a dozen bright lights appearing in the shrouds as if by magic.

"Ah! there they are! right in our course!" cried Gridley, in thunder tones. "A couple of girls in an open canoe! Stand by there, half a dozen of you, with life-lines and life-preservers, to go to the rescue! They seem to have lost their oars and to be wholly helpless. Lively!"

The girls in question were, of course, Dorie Ames and Fanny Clymer.

From the moment of embarking in their canoe, they had found it impossible to withstand the force of the wind and waves, and had gradually drifted to leeward.

Again and again they had been nearly swamped.

They had, of course, taken turns at the oars, but while one rowed with all her might, the

other was obliged to bail the water out of the canoe incessantly, and their strength was rapidly exhausted.

To crown their misfortunes, an immense wave suddenly half-filled the canoe with water, and struck the oars out of Fanny's hands, or else caused her to relinquish them and catch the sides of the canoe to prevent herself from being carried away by the tremendous billows.

From that instant, they had expected every moment to be their last.

In due course, however, they had seen the smack approaching them, and a gleam of hope had flashed into their souls.

If they could only make themselves heard aboard of the stranger!

They devoted themselves to this task with the desperation produced by their situation.

It was their only chance.

Fortunately, as we have seen, their wild appeals were not destined to remain unheeded.

It was easy, with the aid of the lights at his disposal, and especially with the commands of Gridley, for the man at the wheel to lay his bow directly upon the canoe, and in another moment the smack plunged swiftly down upon it.

As will readily be divined, however, there were plenty of stout men upon the bowsprit to seize the two girls, as the canoe swept under the heel of the bowsprit and against the cutwater, and in another instant, with a great shout of triumph on the part of the rescuers, the two girls were drawn from their perilous situation, and passed safely over the low bulwarks to the forward deck.

They were saved!

Almost helpless with their toils and sufferings, and nearly paralyzed with the wild joy which flooded their hearts at their strange rescue, they were borne tenderly to the dingy little cabin, where Gridley and several of his companions gave them the kindest attention, wrapping them up in blankets, mixing hot drinks, and drying with towels their wet hair and features.

"Strange as it may seem to you, boys," at length said Gridley, "this girl is Dorie Ames, the ward of the Lord of the Isle!"

"So she is," returned Rossbrook. "And the other?"

"I think I know who she is," answered Gridley, with an involuntary frown. "We had advice from Chicago that a female detective was to come down here in quest of information, and I should not be at all surprised if this girl is the one in question."

"In that case, one could not have fallen into better hands," suggested Rossbrook significantly.

"No. We'll take 'em to the cavern, and look after their safe-keeping until further advice. My mother will be glad to take care of them, for the sake of their company, and it may be that they can be turned to good account in the crisis which those detectives seem about to bring upon us!"

Both Dorie and Fanny were perfectly conscious of these remarks, but they were too weary to take any notice of them. They merely expressed their thanks for what had been done for them, and proffered a desire, as they roused themselves up, to have the cabin to themselves until the smack should reach its destination—a request that was promptly granted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WRECKERS' CAVERN.

In a large square room which occupied the whole of the basement of a low, stone hut on one of the high, rocky inlets of the Beaver Archipelago, at the base of a tall cliff and within a few yards of the water, three persons were revealed by the rays of a solitary candle.

The first of these persons was Dorie Ames, the second Fanny Clymer, and the third the old woman in whose hands young Gridley had placed them.

"I tell you, Mrs. Gridley—if such is really your name—that you will be severely punished for keeping me here," Dorie was saying, with all the fiery indignation of her nature. "You know who I am, I suppose?"

"Of course you're the ward of the Lord of the Isle," admitted the old woman in a voice as discordant as the cry of a bird of prey. "But who is the Lord of the Isle, if you please? He's as much a vulgar robber and assassin as the worst of them. He's the head of that gang of ship-plunderers of whom you have heard so much lately."

"It's false!" cried Dorie sternly. "You are merely repeating the wicked falsehoods your son or Rufus Bunnell has placed in your mouth!"

Nevertheless, as bravely as Dorie defended her guardian, these repeated accusations made her very uncomfortable.

They at least signified that he was the victim of some terrible imposture or deception, and she began to realize how deeply his fate and her own were enveloped in a meshwork of villainy.

"I'm simply repeating what my son has told me," pursued the old woman, "and as you

know, Miss Dorie, he has been in the employ of Harmon Mapleton long enough to be posted. You'll know it all some day—and much sooner than you expect, no doubt. There are nine of them who know about the false lights. My son is one of the nine, and the light-keeper is another. Your guardian is their leader."

Dorie tossed her head scornfully, as if she deemed such assertions unworthy of the least refutation or comment.

"But enough of all these matters," added Mrs. Gridley. "I repeat, you cannot scare me. I shall not set you free until Rufus Bunnell, or my son, tells me to do so. And if you think you can force me to do as you wish, suppose you set about it? I'm not afraid of the pair of you!"

The old woman arose, placing her hands upon her hips, and stood facing the captives, with a face in which scorn and amusement seemed to be struggling for the mastery.

She was at least five feet nine inches in height, and stout in proportion, with immense hands and arms, and with a display of muscle which would not have been out of place in a prize ring.

Add to these formidable characteristics, the expression of heartless malignancy by which her face was convulsed and it will not be deemed strange that the gentle and delicate Dorie shrunk from her as from an embodied pestilence.

"Very good," was Mrs. Gridley's comment, as she marked the maiden's shrinking attitude. "But unless you are resolved to have a pitched battle with me, you must do as I tell you. You must now follow me, both of you, to another apartment—to your own room, in fact—and I'll not hear another remark on the subject."

As she made this declaration, Mrs. Gridley seized a cord with a knot at the end, which just showed itself through the floor and began drawing it in, as a troller draws in his line after the fish is hooked.

Dorie watched her in amazement.

Immediately all the inner wall of the room—or rather the apparent wall, for it was composed of a dark wall paper glued to a stout sheet of canvas—began rolling up from the floor, precisely as a drop scene rolls up at a theater, and an obscure opening of indefinite extent appeared to the gaze of the captives.

"There! that is enough," observed Mrs. Gridley, when the flexible wall had been rolled up six or seven feet. "The way to your permanent residence is open!"

"Why, it's a cave!" cried Dorie.

As much was shown by the damp, cold air which came out into the room, causing the candle to flicker actively.

As a matter of fact the house had been placed exactly at the mouth of an immense cavern, which had become known only a few years previously, and which had been taken possession of by the wreckers as a store-house for their plunder.

The old woman had been placed in charge of the house as its keeper.

"Yes, it's a cave," answered Mrs. Gridley, "and you will soon know more about it. I expect the wreckers here from one moment to another, and must get you out of the way until morning. Is it a struggle or not? If not, you'll have the goodness to come with me."

She seized the candle with one hand, and extended the other to take Dorie by the arm.

"Do not touch me," cried the girl, with a countenance expressive of the deepest repugnance. "We will follow you."

Curiosity, or a sense of duty, whatever we may call it, had got the better of her fears.

She was anxious to explore the strange cavern. What discoveries might she not make in the interest of her guardian!

"This way," said Mrs. Gridley. "There's no necessity of being afraid or excited. You can come out of the cave when you like. All you have to do is to give my son your promise."

"My promise?"

"Yes; your promise to become his wife, and to never reveal what he has told you, or what you may discover."

She led the way into the cave.

As the captives soon saw for themselves, the cavern was immense, extending hundreds of feet under the towering cliffs, and having corridors and chambers in various directions.

The old woman seemed pleased as she noticed the girls' evident astonishment.

But the size of the place was not more striking than its contents, its roomy arches and openings containing hundreds of barrels, bales, and boxes, in which were goods and provisions of every description, all of which were accumulations from wrecks which had previously taken place in and about the islands.

As the girls stood gazing wonderingly around them, the jingle of a bell suddenly resounded at the door of the storehouse, causing Mrs. Gridley and the captives to start nervously.

"It's for me," cried the old woman. "I'm wanted. More goods are coming. Here is your place, girl—here, in this strong room!"

She threw open the door of a damp and gloomy dungeon, under an arch in the solid rock, and added, with grim sternness:

"In with you on the instant! Do not force me to lay hands upon you, or you'll regret it!"

Her mien was so menacing that the captives hastened to take refuge in the "strong room," as the old woman called it, and the door was closed upon them.

"One word only," enjoined Mrs. Gridley. "Keep very quiet and silent until my son comes to your rescue. Those wreckers are very poor companions for young girls like you. Very few of them would have as much regard for you as my son has shown. Not a word, if you're wise!"

With this, the old woman retraced her steps swiftly to the entrance of the house, where loud knocks for admittance were resounding in rapid succession.

"Who's there?" she called, placing her ear to the stout oaken door.

"Me, mother," was the answer.

"All right."

Mrs. Gridley hastened to remove sundry bars and chains, and to open the door, giving admittance to her son, who, with the aid of a comrade—the same who has been repeatedly mentioned as Rossbrook—was carrying a small iron-bound chest.

"Quick, mother!" exclaimed the foremost of the new-comers. "Here is a chest which we believe to be full of gold! We can hardly carry it. Ross and I intend to keep it all to ourselves!"

The chest was deposited at one side of the room, and Gridley added:

"Quick! sit down upon it, mother, and cover it with your skirts. Do not stir until all the wreckers are gone."

Mrs. Gridley hastened to act upon these requests.

"We have come with a load of goods from the latest wreck, mother," continued young Gridley, "but they are about the poorest we have ever seen. There's another load of them, however, and there'll be lively times among us for the next few hours. Ah, here they come."

The door was set wide open, and the goods came pouring in, the smack having run alongside a little wharf immediately in front of the house, and the wreckers having entered upon the task of removing its cargo to the depths of the cavern.

One of the first to enter at the heels of Gridley and his comrade was the young pilot, who had shouldered a bale of goods, and hastened into the cave as promptly as if he had long been familiar with its secrets.

In the course of a few minutes this work was in full progress.

The young pilot had made three or four trips, when he paused in the outer room an instant to allow a group of men to pass, who bore in their midst an inert and helpless figure.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Gridley, without arising from the chest on which she had seated herself.

"A spy of some sort—we do not know who."

Wally hastened to glance at the inert figure, and recoiled in horror.

The unconscious man was Captain Bush!

"All we know is that we found him on the smack pretending to help us," explained one of the wreckers, as the group swept on into the cavern. "We'll investigate later—after the goods have all been landed. We've been warned that spies are coming."

Hastening to the wharf, Wally seized a bale of goods, which he shouldered, and followed the captain and his captors—with what emotions can be imagined.

He began to fear that his proposed rescue of Dorie and Fanny might not be possible.

CHAPTER XXX.

WALLY AND THE CAPTIVES.

HAVING reached the center of the cavern, the captors of Captain Bush turned to the right and plunged into one of those dim, narrow galleries to which reference has been made.

Arriving at the end of this gallery, where there was a sort of secondary cavern, the wreckers laid their insensible burden on the rocky floor, and their leader flashed the light of his lantern in every direction around him.

They comprised Gridley and Rossbrook, with two others, the former still acting, in the absence of Peter Mapleton, as the head of the band.

"I merely wished to be sure of our company," observed Gridley, as he brought the rays of his lantern to bear upon the face of the prisoner.

"Do any of you know who he is?"

Rossbrook bent nearer, with a start of surprise, while the other two shook their heads.

It almost seemed as if the captain were dead.

His eyes were closed, and there was a wound, half-cut and half-bruise, upon the right temple, from which the blood had flowed freely, trickling over his face and beard.

So suggestive was his appearance that Rossbrook could not help laying his hand upon the heart of the victim to see if it still beat.

"No, he's not dead," pursued Gridley. "I was excited at seeing he was a total stranger and hit him harder than I intended. But he'll soon recover. All he needs is a dash of water."

He seized a dipper which lay on a rocky ledge near him, and caught it full of water from a

small stream that trickled from a projecting point of rock.

With this he bathed the pale forehead and cheeks.

"Ah, I know him now!" cried Rossbrook, with another start. "He's the cap'n of that steamer which has come down here to smoke us out."

"What! With Gibson?"

"Yes, he came down with Gibson. I heard his name mentioned—Cap'n Bush!"

It was evident from these remarks that the steamer and Chief Gibson had not made their appearance at the islands without attracting the notice of the wreckers.

At the announcement of Rossbrook, the four men exchanged glances of consternation.

"I wish I'd know who he was," muttered Gridley. "I would have dropped him into the lake, and that would have been the end of his attempt to trap us!"

A groan came from the sufferer, and his limbs moved convulsively.

"He's coming to—that's clear enough," remarked Rossbrook. "What shall we do with him?"

"Pity it's too late to slip him into the lake," declared Gridley. "But such is the case."

There was no denying the fact.

Some twelve or fifteen men, the most of them not in the secret of the *Flying Glim*, were as busy as bees in the outer galleries, coming and going between the smack and the cavern, and it would not do to give them such an example of the violence of which the members of the gang were capable.

"We shall have to keep him here for the present," added Gridley. "Shall we dress his wounds? He'll come to while we're doing so, and I'd like to ask him a few questions."

The proposition was approved by the other conspirators, and was duly acted upon.

By the time the wound had been dressed, and the traces of blood removed from the face and garments of Captain Bush, he heaved a profound sigh and opened his eyes, looking around upon his captors and upon the walls of the cavern.

"The case might be worse," he said, gathering himself up into a sitting posture. "My last thought was that you'd throw me overboard!"

"We'd have done so if we had known your identity," avowed Gridley, frankly. "Are you not Cap'n Bush?"

The captain assented, carrying his hand to his forehead to investigate his wound and the treatment it had received from his captors.

"You came down the lake with Chief Gibson?"

"I did."

"What are you doing here?"

"Doing my best to discover the gang of assassins who have so long been doing business at the sign of the *Flying Glim*!"

He bent a keen and comprehensive glance upon the ignoble faces around him, and added:

"And to judge by personal appearances, I should say that I have encountered four of the men for whom I was looking!"

"You flatter us," said Gridley. "Nevertheless, there is no occasion for us to deny anything you may be pleased to affirm."

An interval of silence succeeded, the wreckers contemplating their prisoner with as much respect as uneasiness.

During this interval the young pilot concealed himself as thoroughly as possible in one of the crevices of the rocky wall at no great distance.

His purpose was to avoid the detection of his presence and to hasten to the assistance of the girls and Captain Bush as soon as the wreckers should have vanished.

"You admit, then," resumed Gridley, "that you have come here to spy us out?"

"Certainly, young men, and if you are wise you will confess all you know and assist me in my researches," declared Captain Bush. "I do not care for your numbers, and it is hardly necessary for me to declare that I have no fear of you whatever. If you were to be such fools as to kill me, the situation would become all the worse for you. In regard to all you have been doing here, you must be very blind not to realize that you are near the end of your rope. There is a chance for one or two of you to turn State's evidence, if you act promptly, but even this chance will not be long left you. In a general way we have learned all we came here to discover. A gang of ship-plunderers actually exists at the Beaver Islands. I have seen their false light for myself. You have cast away a ship this very night. All the goods stored in this cavern, and those now being brought into it, if I interpret aright all the sounds and voices I hear, are nothing more nor less than plunder. Many of you, perhaps all of you, must be the worst of assassins, and if you escape hanging or life-long imprisonment you will be very fortunate!"

A still deeper silence succeeded.

The words of Captain Bush had evidently impressed the ruffians, and all the more because of the courage he had shown in saying them.

"I have only one thing more to add," pursued

the captain. "I am quite myself again, with the exception of some pain from that cut on my forehead, and I shall be ready to return with you as soon as the smack is unloaded. In the mean time, I invite you to reflect upon what I have said and prepare yourselves to make 'a clean breast of it.' You may leave me here in the interval, or lock me up, what you will."

It was easy to see that these remarks found favor with all four of the hearers.

This was especially the case with Gridley and Rossbrook.

As has been indicated, they had long been disgusted with the "business," they being convinced that Peter Mapleton had appropriated a large share of its net proceeds, and every word of the captain seemed a direct appeal to them to make their peace with the law they had so long violated and defied.

Perhaps they could yet escape the consequences of their acts.

Perhaps they could even secure an official appointment, such as Corry had long been threatening to resign.

They had both been on the verge of treachery to Peter Mapleton for several weeks, and they mentally resolved, after exchanging a few significant glances to come to an understanding with the bold intruder at the earliest possible moment.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Cap'n Bush," said Gridley, after interrogating his companions with a long and keen glance. "I can't leave you here, for some of the others might get hold of you and ply you with annoying questions, even if they did not kill you. I'll lock you up, for your own safety, and send my mother to you with a cup of coffee and something to eat, to keep the chill of this place from striking in."

"As you please," returned the captain. "A drop of warm coffee will certainly be very acceptable."

"You shall have it, sir," assured Gridley. "You have only to follow me."

He conducted the captain to a dungeon not far from that in which the girls had been locked up.

"Step in, please," he added. "It's only for your own safety."

Captain Bush entered the dismal place, seating himself upon a chair he found just within the door.

"I will be back soon," added Gridley. "Even if I am busy outside a little longer than expected, you need have no anxiety. Mother has a key of these retreats, and will come to release you if I don't."

Captain Bush expressed his satisfaction with this arrangement, and Gridley and his companions took their way hastily toward the entrance of the cavern.

No sooner had they vanished from view than Wally made his appearance at the door of the captain's dungeon.

The delight of Captain Bush at seeing him was intense.

"I have been watching events ever since you were brought into the cavern," he explained. "If the case had turned differently, I should have come to your assistance."

"You are still unsuspected, then?"

"Yes, sir—unsuspected and unseen. No one has remarked that I came in this direction."

"Then there is a chance for us," declared Captain Bush, thoughtfully. "Better still, there's a chance for those poor girls. You heard what was said? It is agreed that the mother of one of those rascals shall come here with a cup of coffee, and upon that fact we can build our future, as she will have the keys of these dens with her."

"Yes, sir. If she appears, as promised, we shall not be long in making our escape. Perhaps I had better look around immediately and see where the girls are confined?"

"Do so—poor things."

Lighting a pocket-torch which had been designed especially for secrecy and concealment, as it could be carried in the hollow of the hand and extinguished instantaneously, Wally began his explorations, with a strange glow upon his countenance, and with an equally strange flutter of the heart.

As deeply as he and Captain Bush had been interested in the rescue of the two girls from their foundering canoe, they had not been able to take any part therein, and their later reflections had caused them to thrust themselves as little into prominence as was possible.

It had thus come to pass, that where Wally and the captain had made up their minds to risk their lives, if necessary, in rescuing the two girls, the latter had not so much as caught a glimpse of their foreordained rescuers, and were not even aware of their existence.

After a long search in the rooms and corners of the cavern, Wally caught sight of a tear-wet face, with earnest, imploring eyes, which was pressed against the bars of a grated door, and he knew that he had found what he was seeking.

Advancing rapidly, with an air of relief that spoke volumes, he came to a halt at the door, bowing politely and with a sympathetic respect which instantly put the fair prisoner at her ease.

"You are Miss Ames?" he queried.

Dorie nodded assent, heaving a deep sigh of relief, while a bright, swift flush of joy mantled her features.

She knew by a single glance at the manly face before her that Wally did not belong to the friends of Gridley.

"Permit me a word of explanation," pursued Wally, his face glowing eagerly. "My name is Walter March. I have come down the lake with Colonel Gibson as a pilot and detective—"

"Walter March!" cried Fanny Clymer, as she sprung up impetuously from the only chair the dungeon contained and bounded to the entrance.

"So it is! Oh, merciful heavens!"

"What! you know him!" cried Dorie, her arm encircling the waist of her new acquaintance.

"Yes—that is—I've seen him!" stammered Fanny, her countenance lighting up vividly with her wild sense of delight and relief. "I have seen him twice coming out of Colonel Gibson's private office just as I was going in. And—and—"

"Well, what?" asked Wally, as he clasped the hand somewhat timidly offered him.

"I—I ventured the second time to ask the colonel who you were."

"Singular coincidence!" returned Wally smilingly. "I ventured after that second meeting to ask Colonel Gibson who *you* were!"

All of which is suggestive and significant to a calm looker-on," said Dorie, as she also shook hands with the new-comer. "You must have been interested in each other, to say the least. And the colonel gave you the desired information, Mr. March?"

"He did, Miss Ames. And not only that, but he said he would take great pleasure in introducing us to each other at our next meeting. Little did I think at that moment, Miss Clymer," he added, his handsome face growing tenderly gloomy, "that our 'next meeting' would be here."

"You have come here as an angel of deliverance, no doubt," declared Fanny, an arch smile chasing the last shadow from her face.

"Yes—if you will be patient half an hour, more or less. Let me tell you, in a few rapid sentences just how the case stands."

The information was soon given, and the girls derived such hope from their visitor as to regard their escape as a mere question of time.

"Are you comfortable?" was Wally's next question. "Did that old woman give you a change of clothes?"

"She did, sir, or our teeth would have chattered until now," answered Dorie.

"And they will chatter again if you fail to get us out of this place, Mr. March," said Fanny demurely, "for that Gridley is the most odious blackguard I have ever encountered. He threatens to keep Dorie here until she is gray-headed—or bald, which is it, dear?—unless she will promise to become his wife, and in the same breath he threatens to throw me into the lake!"

"Never mind his threats, Miss Clymer," said Wally with a mien even more reassuring than his words. "It's doubtful about your being troubled with his presence again. I hope to not lose sight of you until you are safe aboard the steamer."

"Many thanks, sir. How delighted I am that you have come to our rescue!"

"It's all like a fairy tale," said Dorie, her bright glances alternating between her companions. "Speaking of fairies, that old woman has promised to bring us a bite to eat, and may she not soon put in an appearance?"

"Let us hope so," returned Wally. "When she comes, ask her to let you out of this hole, that you may eat at your ease. If she consents, the act may save me from the necessity of knocking her on the head to secure the key that unlocks this door."

"We'll insist upon being let out," declared Fanny, with all her habitual determination. "Leave all that to me, Mr. March. When you appear with Captain Bush, you will find us ready for flight."

"It is understood, then? I will go back to the captain and report progress. How delighted he will be if we can all get away together."

We need not dwell upon the anxious interval of waiting that succeeded.

Suffice it to say that the hopes of our friends were more than realized.

Wally had barely had time to explain his discoveries to Captain Bush, when Mrs. Gridley made her appearance with a large tray which was loaded with refreshments, including the hot coffee which her son had promised.

"You may as well come out, sir," she declared, catching the eye of the prisoner. "My son says you are to be made comfortable until his return, and he will then have a serious word with you."

Placing the tray on a projecting rock which answered all the purposes of a table, she unlocked the door of the captain's prison.

He was not slow to make his appearance.

"I am greatly obliged to you, madam," he said, sitting down to his repast with the air of

not having a thought beyond it. "That coffee will be a great comfort. I really need it!"

"While you are busy with it, I will attend to another matter," said Mrs. Gridley, as she turned away. "If you should want anything more, I shall be back in a few minutes!"

As soon as she had gone, Wally again emerged from his concealment.

"She has probably waited upon the girls already," he remarked, accepting a portion of the coffee from the captain's hand. "In that case, she'll not have us here to breakfast!"

The two men did not linger—merely long enough to brace themselves up with the warming liquid against their expected exposure to the cold and win!—and then they stole noiselessly in the direction in which the old woman had vanished.

Sure enough!

The girls had been waited upon first, and their request to come out of their dungeon had been granted.

With what silence and celerity they joined their rescuers, moving toward the entrance, will be readily comprehended.

For once the fates were propitious.

At the moment the fugitives reached the outer room, Mrs. Gridley was busy in a little kitchen adjacent, and did not see them.

Another moment, and they had turned the key, which was in the lock, and passed out into the night.

"And now for our boat and for home," said Wally, with a wild thrill of delight. "We're clear of that crowd forever!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN QUEST OF THE PROOFS.

It is no easy matter to record the surprise with which Colonel Gibson listened to the declarations of the Lord of the Isle concerning the identity of the terrible villain who had so long been the terror of the Lake Islands.

He started as violently as if a deadly blow had been aimed at his own head.

"What! the paralytic!" he exclaimed.

Harmon Mapleton bowed, again exchanging a glance of intelligence with his son.

It was the first allusion which had been made to "the paralytic" since the colonel's arrival.

It was clear, therefore, that the visitor had posted himself previously in regard to "the paralytic," as had evidently been his course in regard to so many other features of the situation.

"It seems to be a puzzle that you are giving me," said the colonel. "How can a man who is helpless and bed-ridden figure in such acts and performances as we have been discussing?"

"I was coming to that, colonel," avowed the Lord of the Isle, whose stern countenance attested that he had nerved himself for the painful task devolving upon him. "The truth is, there is no paralytic in the case. My brother has never been ill for a moment during the three years the wreckers of the *Flying Glim* have been in existence."

"Not—ill?"

"No, sir. The whole thing has been a fraud and pretense, and the result of a conspiracy entered into between this man and his wife, with various parties unknown, to ruin me."

"You are speaking of your brother, Peter Mapleton, who has kept to his bed for three years past?"

"Exactly. He did not have any paralytic stroke three years ago, but simply pretended to have one, and all he has done since has been in keeping with this original imposture. Thus, while pretending to be unable to turn over in his bed without the assistance of his wife, he has in reality been a model of health, strength and activity. While lying abed daytimes, he has been as active as any prowling wolf at night."

The visitor drew a long sigh of comprehension but without losing in the slightest degree the wondering and startled look which had mantled his face.

Evidently, in all his career, he had never heard of a case of villainy and imposture quite as far-reaching as that now presented to his official inquiries.

"It—it is not a theory that you are advancing, Mr. Mapleton?" he queried, with bated breath.

"No, sir. It is the most certain and absolute of facts. Peter Mapleton has never been helpless for an hour!"

"In other words, he lies abed during the day, receiving his chosen visitors and discussing his projects with them, and then steals forth at night, armed to the teeth, and as wary as a tiger, to set up the *Flying Glim* and p'under the ships which are cast away in consequence? Is not this what you mean, Mr. Mapleton?"

"Such is the absolute truth."

"And he comes forth disguised to resemble you as closely as possible, does he not?"

"Yes, sir. I am sorry to add that I have played directly into his hands, during all this time by giving him my cast-off clothes. I deemed it my duty to make him comfortable in every way, but did not deem it necessary to supply him with the newest fashions and latest cuts in garments."

"Naturally enough," commented Gibson. "You have of course supplied your brother and his wife with provisions?"

"With provisions, and money, and everything the situation seemed to call for, including a well-furnished cottage. In short, I have done, Colonel Gibson, just what you or any other honorable man would have done for a dependent relative suffering from a terrible or deadly affliction."

"Your brother resembles you, I believe?"

The Lord of the Isle assented.

"Allow me to observe, Colonel Gibson," said Paul, "that my uncle resembles my father precisely as a caricature resembles the original. In other terms, there are more points of dissimilarity than of agreement between their outlines and features, to any one who takes the trouble to look beyond the surface. How could the noble, kindly face of my father be really likened to the ignoble and hardened countenance of a ruffianly assassin?"

"I get your idea perfectly, Paul," returned Colonel Gibson, "and am entirely of your opinion. There is very little real resemblance between the two brothers, and you are not the first person who has noted the fact."

He heaved another long sigh of relief, as if greatly enlightened and pleased with the turn the investigation had taken.

"How far away from you does this brother live?" he resumed.

"About half a mile."

"Near the water?"

"Within a few rods of it!"

"In a sheltered and retired spot?"

"One of the loveliest to be found on the whole island."

"With no immediate neighbors?"

Again the Lord of the Isle assented.

"There is no one within a quarter of a mile of my uncle's cottage," said Paul, who was following every word of the investigation closely, "and it should be added that the persons nearest him are likely to be among those with whom he shares his secrets, or, in other terms, are associated with him in his crimes."

"But how does it happen that no one has ever got trace of this horrible misfortune?" demanded the colonel. "You have often visited your brother, no doubt, Mr. Mapleton?"

"Once a week, I should think, on an average."

"At all hours of the day and night, just as it happened?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you never found him absent?"

"No, sir. It has happened several times, when I called in the evening that I found him asleep, and his wife has begged me not to disturb him."

"And you always refrained from disturbing him on such occasions?"

"Naturally. His wife would remark that he had been too agonized to sleep for two days or nights, or something of that sort, and I would put off till morning whatever I had to say to him."

"But how do you explain, I say, that he has been so fortunate as to never, never be found absent from home during such a long period as three years?"

"The only explanation I can suggest is twofold: his constant watchfulness, and the fact that he had manufactured an effigy, or 'dummy,' to take his place in the bed and represent him in his absence."

"Ah! there is a 'dummy' in the case?" cried the colonel, as his features relaxed for the first time in an expression which was not far removed from a smile.

"Yes, there is a 'dummy.'" My son has seen it with his own eyes this very night—within a few minutes after his return, in fact—and hence there can be no question or mistake about its existence!"

"Then, doubtless, that 'dummy' has often figured as your brother on those occasions when you have called upon him in the evening?"

"No doubt of it whatever."

The colonel reflected a few moments in silence, and then quietly gained his feet.

"Let us see if your brother is at home at the present moment," he proposed. "This would seem to be the next step in the inquiry."

"You mean that Paul and I are to go with you?" asked Harmon Mapleton.

"Of course."

"Then I would like to summon two or three of my tenants, in whom I have confidence, and who live just back of the garden, and leave them on guard during my absence."

"Quite right. Let Paul go for them."

Paul hurried away upon this errand, after a few directions from his father.

"The truth is," explained the Lord of the Isle, as he led the way down-stairs, "I am afraid Peter may have witnessed your arrival, and be hanging about the house, in which case he might avail himself of our absence to set fire to the premises, or resort to any other act of desperation that may be in keeping with his recent history."

"No doubt he's dangerous enough, if he realizes that he has reached the end of his rope," returned the colonel. "Shall we light our way

with lanterns, or can you guide me to your brother's cottage without them?"

"We had better go in the dark, sir," answered Harmon Mapleton. "So as to give no hint of our approach. It will be sufficient if we take lanterns with us, so that we can produce a light at any desired moment."

Paul soon returned, accompanied by the man to whom his father had alluded, and the Lord of the Isle addressed a few words to them, as also to Mrs. Mansion, directing that no one should be admitted to the house under any pretense whatever until further orders.

"Of course we'll go armed, Colonel Gibson," said Paul, as he slipped a revolver into a side-pocket and handed another to his father. "If we are in no danger from my wretched uncle, we may be from some of the desperadoes who are associated with him."

"Quite right," said Gibson again. "Besides, as I intend to arrest the supposed paralytic and take him aboard the steamer, it will be well to make a display of force."

The trio left the house promptly, the Lord of the Isle offering his arm to his visitor.

"Of course," resumed Gibson, "I have not come down the lake upon this inquiry without taking a number of measures which I have not advertised in the papers. I have no doubt that Peter Mapleton has been more or less under the critical observation of a friend of mine for several days past, and I hope to soon be in possession of a report that will clear up a number of the problems by which we are puzzled."

"The sooner the better," said the Lord of the Isle, in a tone of deep anguish. "No one can know what I have suffered since this awful shadow fell upon me!"

"One point I had fully resolved upon before seeing you," said Gibson, "and that was to call a council of first-class physicians upon the case of your brother."

"Ah! you suspected, then—"

"No, I did not suspect him of shamming, but it was suggested to me by a clever young friend—a lady, in fact—he referred to Fanny Clymer, as he had done a moment before—that such would be a very likely and natural solution of the whole puzzle."

Very little more was said until the trio came in sight of the cottage where Peter and his wife had so long resided.

It was enshrouded in darkness, as was, of course, fully expected, in view of the lateness of the hour and the usual habits and practices of the inhabitants of the island.

"How shall we proceed?" whispered the Colonel, as the trio halted near the house. "Shall I advance alone to the door, while you and Paul place yourselves on the watch at the sides and back entrance, so that nothing can escape our attention?"

"Yes, let us take this course."

The suggestion was duly acted upon, and the colonel knocked for admittance.

Not getting any response, he tried the knob of the door, discovering, greatly to his surprise, that it yielded to his touch.

Entering the hall he lighted the lantern he had brought upon his arm, and then boldly entered the room on his right, the door of which was open—the sitting-room, in fact, which had been so long the abode of the pretended paralytic.

A single glance sufficed to give the visitor a comprehension of the situation.

The bed in the corner was empty, as was the great easy-chair standing in front of it.

The pretended paralytic and his wife had vanished.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRAIL OF A CRIME.

At a cry of mingled surprise and vexation which escaped Colonel Gibson, the Lord of the Isle and Paul hastened to join him.

"Here's a fine state of things!" cried the Colonel, flashing his light into the adjacent apartments. "Our birds have flown! Not a trace of them—not a trace!"

The father and son hastened to light their lanterns and join the colonel in his explorations, but the measure only served to verify the discovery he had announced.

"They must have seen you here, Paul, the one or the other of them, as you came or went," suggested the Lord of the Isle, as the trio returned to the sitting-room.

"Let me know, Paul, the circumstances under which you made the visit your father alludes to," demanded Colonel Gibson.

Paul briefly narrated the facts, as they are known to the reader, mentioning particularly the pretended confession of his uncle, the empty bed, his sleeping aunt, and the other features of his visit, including the dummy.

"Clearly enough," commented Gibson, "the couple have taken the alarm from some source, and have been quick to act upon it. The bed is as cold as a stone, the fire nearly out, and the water in the tea-kettle scarcely lukewarm. They must have been gone an hour!"

While speaking, the voice of the worthy colonel had passed through all the inflections, beginning with a simple surprise and ending with a positive rage.

"If that man really escapes me," he resumed,

with fierce emphasis, "I shall never forgive myself. Pity I didn't act sooner! Pity I didn't act in a different fashion!"

He flashed his light around to see what the fugitives had taken with them, when his glances rested upon the letter Peter Mapleton had left upon the mantle-piece for his brother.

"Here's something for you, Mr. Mapleton," he said, passing the letter to its destination. "Perhaps it will throw some light on the subject of this sudden departure."

The Lord of the Isle read the letter, and handed it to Gibson, who also read it and then looked up with a countenance of the most incredulous description.

"Do you take any stock in that chatter, Mr. Mapleton?" he asked.

"Not a particle! The letter is merely an attempt to throw dust in our eyes. Does it look reasonable, to begin with, to suppose that any strange Englishman cruising about the lakes would have made his acquaintance before making mine?"

"Or that any such stranger would take such a sudden interest in an unknown paralytic as to carry him off between two days for medical treatment?" sneered Colonel Gibson, almost fiercely.

"The whole letter is preposterous," declared Paul, who had rapidly taken cognizance of its contents. "The only rational view to take of the situation is to consider that my uncle has fled."

"And a very annoying flight it is," declared Colonel Gibson, with a countenance which had flashed to a vivid red. "What course would he naturally take, Paul? Would he take refuge with some confederate on one of the adjacent islands, or would he take a short cut to the mainland, east or west, and try to lose himself in some distant wilderness?"

"I am really at a loss what to say, Colonel Gibson," replied Paul. "When I was here before, there was a sole-leather trunk under the bed, which is there no longer. That fact would seem to show that the fugitives went away with some deliberation."

"True, Paul," said the chief. "Another thing, Mrs. Mapleton would not consent to trust herself in a small rowboat or a canoe in the present state of the weather, would she?"

"Not a bit of it, if she is what she used to be," declared Paul. "We may take it for granted that the couple have gone away in a boat of some size."

"Has your brother any such boat at his disposal, Mr. Mapleton?" pursued Gibson.

"I know of none, sir. I do not even know that there is a single boat of any size owned on the island."

"And even if such a boat were at command, Mrs. Mapleton would hardly care to embark in it," said the colonel, thoughtfully. "The night is too dark and foggy, and there is too much wind, for such a woman to go forth upon such a voyage."

"Unless she is in a terrible panic!" suggested Paul. "Is it not possible that they are hidden somewhere on the island, father?"

"That is, indeed, possible, and likely," replied the Lord of the Isle. "There is many a hole in the cliffs where shelter could be found for the night, as also many a nook in the woods where any one could be much more comfortable at such a moment than in an open boat on the water, to say nothing of safety. It is quite possible that my brother and his wife have taken temporary refuge in one of the huts occupied by his confederates."

Chief Gibson again gave a few moments to earnest reflection.

"Be all this as it may," he then said, "our first step shall be to explore every nook and crevice of the island, as well as every barn or dwelling. If we had a dog of even fair capacity, would it not be possible for him to follow the trail of the fugitives?"

"That is indeed a suggestion worth acting upon," declared Harmon Mapleton. "One of my tenants—one of those now at the house, in fact—has a dog for which he claims the most extraordinary sagacity."

"Indeed! Let's go and see him!"

"Or, rather," suggested Paul, "let me go for the dog and his owner, father, while you and the colonel give the cellar and upper rooms a thorough survey."

"A good idea," said Gibson. "They're more likely to have concealed themselves in the house than they are to have gone out into the tempest."

"You referred to Sylvester, did you not, father?" asked Paul, as he gained the door.

"I did, my son, and I think his dog came to the house with him."

Paul hurried away without further remark, and the two men proceeded to carry out his suggestion for a thorough exploration of their surroundings.

They had completed the task without making any other discovery than that the mask of the dummy had been destroyed and the pieces put in the stove, when Paul returned to the cottage, accompanied by Sylvester and his dog.

"The question is this, Sylvester," said the Lord of the Isle, addressing his tenant. "My

brother and his wife have either left this place of their own volition, or they have been carried off under circumstances of which we are wholly ignorant. I have suggested that your dog may be able to solve the puzzle for us by indicating what direct on the pair took on leaving the cottage."

"That's a matter Pearl can very soon settle for you, sir," said Sylvester, with a glance of pride and admiration at the animal which was already snuffing keenly at the door-sill. "As you see, she is already at work. Eh, Pearl?"

The dog responded with a bark.

"We've only to let her out and follow her," added Sylvester, "and she'll track Mister Peter and his wife as well as if she had seen them leave the house, sir. Please let me have a lantern, as I cannot follow her in the darkness."

"But can you follow her with the lantern?" asked the Lord of the Isle.

"Certainly, sir."

"I should think she'd leave you far behind," added Harmon Mapleton, as he gave Sylvester the lantern he himself had been using.

"And so she does, sir," avowed the man; "but she returns every few rods to make sure that I am following her."

The Lord of the Isle expressed his satisfaction, as did Colonel Gibson, and the door was opened, the dog springing out into the darkness.

A brief turn or two on the steps and the walk sufficed to give the sagacious animal the necessary starting-point, and then, with a whine of delight, it sprang away swiftly in the direction the fugitives had taken, or in a course almost parallel with the shore of the lake.

"That is the direction they took, sir," announced Sylvester, with an air of the serenest certitude. "We have only to follow her."

He hastened to follow the dog, while the Lord of the Isle and his visitor, with Paul lighting their way, proceeded in the same direction in a more leisurely manner.

On and on went the dog, with no other sound than an occasional whine of satisfaction, but with frequent returns to her master, as if to encourage him to follow her lead.

At the end of a few minutes she came to a halt, staring at the ground, and trembling in every limb, somewhat in the style of an eager pointer at the moment the hunter is closing in upon his game.

Flashing his light over the spot thus indicated, Sylvester muttered a few words indicative of his satisfaction, and waited for the two behind him to join him.

"They were here—a man and a woman, you see, sir," announced Sylvester, as he pointed out both classes of footsteps in the light and yielding soil. "Yonder is where a trunk was placed on the ground, and it is evident from the position of the smaller tracks that the woman sat down upon it. Here are the marks of a second trunk, or of a valise—most likely the latter."

The facts were so clearly as he stated them to be that not a single doubt was expressed or a single question asked.

"And from here?" queried Gibson, whose eyes regarded the movements of the dog as if fascinated.

"From here the man evidently went to the light-house," affirmed Sylvester, as he looked up at the rays pouring upon him from that direction. "Yes, here are his footsteps as made in going and coming," and he passed his lantern along the surface of the ground. "Find him, Pearl—find him."

The dog vanished like a phantom in the direction of the light.

"Of course we'll follow her," said Gibson.

The dog came back again and again to her master as rapidly as he pushed forward on the trail, but at last she became as motionless as a statue at the foot of the light-tower, fixing her eyes intently upon some object which had arrested her gaze—some object which was evidently of a horrible nature, as the animal crouched in a half-seared attitude, and uttered low, rapid, eager whines of terror.

"She's found something," said Sylvester, quickening his pace and flashing the rays of his lantern as far ahead of him as possible. "I never saw her do that before, sir. What can be the matter?"

These remarks were quite enough to quicken the pace of the investigators, and in a few moments more they were mounting the little knoll upon which the light-house and the adjoining dwelling had been erected.

"In heaven's name, what have we here?" cried Sylvester, checking his steps suddenly.

"Nothing—except that the old man has fallen asleep," said the Lord of the Isle, as he came to a halt beside his tenant. "Nor is it a wonder, at such an hour, considering his age—"

The speaker checked his remarks abruptly, a sudden flash of the light in the hands of his tenant giving him a view of the situation.

"No, that is no sleep," he added. "The old man is dead!"

Yes, he was dead!

He sat there, in his rude chair, at the foot of the light tower, against which his chair was leaning—sat there, just where Peter Maple-

ton had left him, and just as Peter Mapleton had left him, except that he had drawn from his pocket with the last effort of his expiring forces a small roll of note-paper, which was now grasped tightly in his still and icy hand.

His eyes fixed and staring, his features showing the pallidity of death, and his frame already cold and rigid, he presented a picture well calculated to surprise a beholder with terror and wonder.

Advancing his lantern nervously, Sylvester read the superscription upon the roll of paper clutched in the hand of old Corry.

It consisted of these words:

"To the Lord of the Isle."

"It is for you, sir," said Sylvester to his employer, as he stepped forward and gently detached the manuscript from the hand of the dead man. "It may be a confession! It may be that he has killed himself! But how strange that the footsteps of—of the man we have been following should lead up to this steep spot and then lead away again! Here are tumbleders, too, on the bench. The—the man and the old light-keeper evidently took a drink together!"

The Lord of the Isle had extended his hand for the document, but at the last moment he withdrew it, while a look akin to horror passed over his features.

"I waive all rights to the manuscript, under existing circumstances," he said, in a voice husky with emotion. "You may hand it to Colonel Gibson!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TO WHAT THE TRAIL LED.

THE colonel accepted the manuscript, with a face nearly as serious as that of the dead man before him, and thrust it into his pocket.

"We'll look at it later," he said. "In the mean time, Sylvester, let us retrace our steps, with the dog, to the spot where that trunk was placed on the ground."

The man seized his dog by the collar and turned in the direction indicated.

"This old light-keeper had no family, did he, Mr. Mapleton?" pursued the colonel.

"No, sir."

"Then I wish Paul would go for assistance and see that the body receives the attention and that another man is placed in charge of the light."

Paul hastened to act upon these suggestions.

"I want to see what those footsteps will lead up to, Sylvester," continued Colonel Gibson, as he drew the arm of the Lord of the Isle with him. "Ten to one they will take us to the beach."

The spot was soon reached where the trunk and valise had been rested upon the ground, and then Sylvester incited his dog to find the new trail.

The task was only too easy, and in another moment the dog had bounded away toward the lake.

"I could even follow the trail without the dog," declared Sylvester, as he again passed his light along the surface of the ground. "You see, gentlemen, that the trail here is the same as it was before—the trail of a man and a woman!"

"That's clear enough," continued Gibson, scanning the trail for himself. "The couple have evidently made for the water!"

The dog had again vanished into the darkness ahead of the explorers, but again she came back, as if not to lose sight of those she was guiding.

A few minutes more sufficed for the work in hand, the trail ending at the beach.

"It is here that they embarked," resumed Gibson, as he flashed his light over the yielding sands. "Here is where the trunk was deposited. Yonder are the marks of the valise the other side of you are the tracks of the boat, as left at the moment the couple stepped into it, with their baggage!"

There was no disputing these facts and conclusions.

"But what is that yonder?" added Colonel Gibson, as he peered out upon the water as far as possible. "A steamer, as true as I live!"

The Lord of the Isle lent his glances in the same direction, with a start of wonder, joy, and surprise.

What he saw was the small, snug steam-yacht which had so nearly cost him his life a few hours earlier.

"Evidently our mysterious Englishman!" he said, in a startled whisper. "He has not yet had time to take his departure."

"Or he is awaiting further arrivals!" breathed Chief Gibson, with a wild flash of joy and relief in his eyes.

"In any case, we are in time to take a look aboard of her!" suggested Harmon Mapleton.

"Yes, and here comes a boat for us!"

It was only too true!

A boat had pushed off from the steam-yacht, and were quietly and cautiously nearing the beach.

"Out with your lights," ordered Gibson, in a sharp, quick whisper, suiting his own action to the order. "If there is any mistake in the matter, do not give that man a chance to discover it until after he is in our midst!"

The order had been obeyed even before the chief ceased speaking.

The little group stood upon the beach in such profound darkness that for a moment they were lost to each other.

At the end of a few moments the man in the boat rested on his oars, looking toward the beach with the air of being somewhat undecided.

"Is it you, Mr. Wilkie?" he asked, in such a cautious tone of voice that it barely reached the ears of Gibson and his companions.

"Wilkie?" repeated Chief Gibson, in the ear of the Lord of the Isle.

"I know nothing of any such man," declared Harmon Mapleton.

The question was repeated from the boat, a little louder than before.

"Who else should it be?" returned Chief Gibson. "Do not keep us waiting, man! Come on—come on!"

The rower resumed progress, and in a few moments more the boat reached the beach, its occupant springing out into the midst of the group awaiting him.

"You spoke about being cautious, you will remember, Mr. Wilkie," said the new-comer, apologetically. "That is why I had a little hesitation—"

"Never mind that," said Gibson, placing himself in the stern of the boat. "Ugh! such a night! Take me off to the steamer as quick as you can!"

"And your friends, sir?" demanded the new-comer, who was just able to make out the outlines of the Lord of the Isle and Sylvester and the dog in the darkness.

"They will come later, remaining just where they are for the present. Push off!"

The new-comer hastened to comply, and nothing more was said until the boat had reached the yacht and been secured to the tailrail, while the two men passed over the low bulwarks to the deck.

"This way, sir," invited the colonel's unknown guide, as he took the lead toward the entrance of the cabin. "I have been very impatient for your return, as the yacht begins to feel the force of the wind and swell—as you see. If we are not going to start immediately, we ought to pull around to the Pool Anchorage for shelter."

As he finished these remarks, the speaker reached the bottom of the companionway, and faced about to close the doors behind them.

"Sit down, sir," he added, waving the colonel politely to a sofa. "The fires are banked, as you ordered, and we can start at an instant's warning. *Death and confusion!*"

The speaker leaped backward a couple of yards, with a sudden change of countenance, looking as if he had seen a phantom.

"What's the matter?" calmly asked Colonel Gibson, as he seated himself deliberately on the sofa to which his attention had been called.

"Matter, sir! Why, you are not Mr. Wilkie at all, sir!"

"Not Mr. Wilkie? Then who am I, if you please?"

"That remains to be seen. I—I think I know you, sir!"

"You do? That's certainly a point in the right direction. Suppose I turn my face a little more to the light—so!"

"Ah! I know you now, sir, as strange as it seems to see you so far away from Chicago! You are Colonel Gibson, the chief of police!"

"That's the view my wife takes of me and so I will not pretend to deny its truth," said the colonel. "But since you know me so readily, I really ought to have a sort of an inkling of your identity! Suppose you turn your face to the light a little more so that I—sure enough! Why, how do you do, Captain Klingman? I am very glad to see you!"

The colonel arose, as promptly as smilingly, offering his hand, and Captain Klingman shook it with a heartiness and respect about which there could be no question.

"Sit down, sit down, my dear colonel," said the captain. "This is a most agreeable surprise. By what good or bad luck have you drifted so far away from your buoys? A secret mission, perhaps?"

"Well, yes, although I do not say that I shall keep my business from you," declared the colonel, with an air which attested that he regarded the captain as worthy of all confidence and honor. "But what are you doing, if you please? Who is it that you are banking your fires for in the teeth of a nor'wester? Is it a secret?"

"Certainly not—as far as I am concerned," confessed the captain. "This yacht is the Una. I have brought her down the lake to a wealthy gentleman named Wilkie, who has recently purchased her in Chicago."

"Indeed! Is this 'wealthy gentleman' an Englishman?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. To tell the truth, I do not know a great deal about him, and that little is quite enough to suggest that he is involved in some mystery."

"Has he been living on Mapleton Island, Captain Klingman?"

"Such appears to be the case, colonel, although I cannot say certainly. He seems to have been here several weeks, at least, as he told

me, a month ago, to bring the Una here as soon as certain changes in her machinery and furnishing were completed."

"And his name is Wilkie?"

"So he says, sir."

"Is he alone, or is he accompanied by a family?" pursued Chief Gibson, with a very serious and interested air, as if he were settling down to an important and promising investigation.

"He is accompanied by his wife!"

"Ah! by his wife? Where is she?"

"In their state-room amidships!"

"Where she can hear me?"

"Yes—if one cared to open the door and listen, or take a few steps in this direction. But there is nothing to be apprehended from her in that line. She seems to have only one thought, sir!"

"And that one, captain?"

"Is to keep an eye upon a sole-leather trunk she and her husband brought aboard with them! I don't believe she has taken her eyes off from it since it was placed in her state-room!"

"Ah!" commented the captain again. "That is singular! And Mr. Wilkie? Where is he at the moment?"

"Prowling somewhere about the shore—I do not know where or for what. I expected him back an hour ago. Something seems to have gone wrong with him. He even spoke of having failed to see some person he is very anxious to meet."

"But he may arrive at any moment?"

"That's what he said."

The colonel gave a few moments to the reflections growing out of these observations.

"What sort of a man is he?" he then resumed.

"A man of middle age, somewhat dandified, with a nervous air and watchful manner; a man who appears to be got up for the occasion, like an actor for a character he is playing—if you will excuse me for blurting out the somewhat singular impression his garb and aspect have made upon me!"

"Did he say anything about knowing any one on this island?"

"He did. He mentioned that he was well acquainted with Harmon Mapleton, who is generally known as the Lord of the Isle!"

"Indeed!" said the colonel, with a very singular intonation, as if startled.

Captain Klingman mused a moment, and then added:

"So well, in fact, is Mr. Wilkie acquainted with Harmon Mapleton, that, a month ago, in Chicago, I ventured to identify Mr. Mapleton, at Mr. Wilkie's desire, at a bank where the Lord of the Isle was presenting a check for a hundred thousand dollars!"

"Ah! is that so?" cried Colonel Gibson, gaining his feet as abruptly as if an electric battery had suddenly been brought in contact with him. "Excuse the bluntness of the question, captain, but do you respect my position and character enough to do as I tell you for one hour?"

"For an hour or a week, or any length of time you may desire, colonel."

"Then do not tell Mr. Wilkie that you have seen me or make any allusion to what has passed between us!"

"I will not, sir."

"Do not take the Una away from this island until you have seen me again."

"I shall obey your orders!"

"And, finally, do not wait here for the return of Mr. Wilkie, but take the Una to the Pool Anchorage and anchor her near my steamer, which you will find there. You can make this move even in this darkness?"

"Oh, yes. I am as familiar with Pool Anchorage as I am with the nose on my face, having often run in there for shelter, at all hours of the day and night, and in all weathers, as I have passed up and down the lakes."

"Then go to Pool Anchorage as soon as you have taken me ashore. Of course you will have to leave a man on the beach to tell Mr. Wilkie where you are. All you need say in explanation of the move is what you said to me a few minutes ago, namely, that the Una begins to be uncomfortable where she is now lying. You comprehend me in every particular?"

"Perfectly, Colonel Gibson, and I will do in every particular what you have told me."

"You are a man of honor, Captain Klingman, and it is because you are such that I have ventured to ask you to execute these several measures. Your compliance, I have no doubt, will greatly further the ends of justice."

"Depend upon me, sir!"

"And now to put me ashore!"

Captain Klingman led the way to the deck and to the boat lying alongside, and in a couple of minutes more Colonel Gibson had been restored to the presence of the Lord of the Isle, who was still standing on the beach, with Sylvester and the latter's dog beside him.

"A word more, captain," said Colonel Gibson after sending a keen glance around and listening a moment. "This gentleman is the Lord of the Isle. Mr. Mapleton, allow me to present to you Captain Klingman, a gentleman in every sense of the word whom I have had the pleasure of meeting frequently in Chicago."

A brief exchange of remarks followed this introduction, as the two gentlemen shook hands cordially.

"I may mention to you in confidence, captain," then observed the colonel, "that Mr. Mapleton knows nothing whatever of your employer, Mr. Wilkie."

The captain was startled to breathlessness by this declaration.

"For this and other reasons," added Gibson, "I advise you not to let Mr. Wilkie control or direct your movements in any way. Do not allow him and his wife to remove the trunk of which you have spoken. Let everything remain as it is until Mr. Mapleton and I come off to your boat, which we may do as soon as you have reached the Pool."

"I think I understand you, colonel," remarked Klingman. "There is something very wrong about Mr. Wilkie?"

"Very wrong, indeed, sir, if I am not greatly mistaken!"

"Once more, then—depend upon me!"

And with this, Captain Klingman took his way back to the Una.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VERIFICATION.

NOT a word was said until Captain Klingman was out of hearing.

"Good news, sir," then said the colonel, as he took the arm of the Lord of the Isle again, and drew him away from the beach, beckoning Sylvester to follow with his dog. "I am almost certain that we shall intercept the fugitives!"

"That is good news indeed—as painful as it will be for me to see Peter punished for his wickedness," returned Harmon Mapleton. "It is better that his awful career should be checked now than later."

He started violently, rubbing his eyes a moment, as he looked toward the villa, and then uttered a cry akin to terror.

"Can it be—that Peter has set fire to the house?" he gasped, in a voice of consternation. "If not, what is the meaning of the unwonted gleams of light displayed in that quarter? Quick, colonel! Let us hasten in that direction!"

"Perhaps it is a procession with the body of the light-keeper," suggested Gibson, quickening his pace.

"No, the light-keeper will be laid out at his residence, which is beside the light, you know," replied the Lord of the Isle. "Hear those cries, too! Something must be wrong at the villa. See! the whole front of the house is ablaze! Hasten!"

"What we hear are cries of joy," returned the colonel. "Some pleasant discovery has evidently been made. See there! Listen!"

An agile figure had appeared on a crest at no great distance, in the midst of a blaze of torches and lanterns, and the voice of Paul was heard crying:

"Come home, father! Dorie is here!"

The wild joy these words gave Harmon Mapleton cannot be adequately portrayed.

"I hear you, Paul," he shouted, in reply. "We will soon be with you!"

At this response, a great stir arose in the distance, and the gleam of light which had startled the Lord of the Isle shot up wider and higher, while the air was rent with shouts from a score of voices.

"See! they have started bonfires on the walk in front of the house," exclaimed Colonel Gibson, who had the advantage of being a little taller than his host. "In honor of the return of Dorie, no doubt. See! they are coming to meet us. What joy to see them so happy!"

Continuing his rapid advance, the Lord of the Isle gave all his attention to the demonstrations of gladness in and around his dwelling.

"Yes, there they come," repeated Gibson, "with Paul and your ward at their head. It is time to light our lanterns, is it not, and show them where we are?"

"Yes, yes."

By the time this measure had been taken, an excited and jubilant procession, consisting of some scores of persons, came hurrying down the slope toward the Lord of the Isle and Colonel Gibson, who were sufficiently revealed to the gaze of their friends by the lanterns they carried.

Nearer and nearer came Pearl and Dorie, arm in arm, with the light of a score of torches illuminating their happy faces, and at length they threw themselves into the arms of the overjoyed parent and guardian, with cries of the wildest joy and thanksgiving.

"My little girl is safe, after all, it seems," exclaimed the Lord of the Isle, as he returned the maiden's fervent caresses. "Home again, nevermore to leave us!"

"And who is this with them?" cried Colonel Gibson, with a surprise that caused him to take a couple of steps backward. "I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses. My young pilot, Walter Smith, arm in arm with Fanny Clymer, and both of them looking as happy as if they owned all the world and everything in it. This is more like a dream than like a reality. How does it happen that you two have got mixed to this extent without waiting for the introduction I had promised?"

"Believe me, Colonel Gibson, lightning will strike where it is sent," declared Wally, smilingly, as he shook hands with his chief, "and it is owing to this circumstance that Fanny and I no longer have the least need of the favor you so kindly offered. As you will realize, after a single glance at our faces, we are in a fair way to make all desirable haste toward that haven of rest called wedded felicity."

"And you, Captain Bush," cried Chief Gibson, catching sight of his subordinate not far behind Fanny and Wally, "how does it happen that you have allowed these young people to make such rapid progress in their wooing? Methinks they are further along to-night than you and I were with our respective charmers after many long months of unwearied devotion!"

"True, colonel—very true," acknowledged the captain, wringing the hand offered him, "but you must remember that circumstances alter cases! Wally has not only rescued the young lady from a horrible dungeon, but he has nearly lost his life with her in a voyage of eight or ten miles from Rodney Island. Such a voyage, sir, that we all gave ourselves up for lost, never expecting to see *terra firma* again, and it seemed wrong to our young pilot to allow such an event to happen without having frankly told the young lady that he had loved her from the first moment of their first meeting!"

"And—and she boxed his ears?"

"Perhaps she did, sir, for I noticed that their heads were so near together that they might have readily been mistaken for another freak of nature in the style of the Siamese Twins!"

"All of which shall be forgiven when I receive an invitation to the wedding," declared the colonel, shaking hands warmly with Fanny. "In the mean time, here are a few of us who must exchange a few words concerning a very important matter."

He motioned the two young couples to follow him, with a similar hint to Captain Bush, and led the way, with his arm still within that of Harmon Mapleton, into a summer-house near which they chanced to be passing, and closed the door behind him.

"I address myself to you, Fanny, in the first place," resumed Gibson. "What success have you had here?"

"The best in the world, sir!" answered Fanny, her face radiant with a joyous peace.

"You have learned who is at the head of the gang of wreckers in question?"

"Yes, sir."

"Beyond all doubt?"

"Beyond any possibility of doubt."

"And who is he?"

"A pretended paralytic, a brother of the Lord of the Isle, a man named Peter Mapleton!"

"You hear, my friends?" cried the colonel, turning to the father and son and Dorie. "This young lady was sent down here by me nearly a fortnight ago to solve the riddle which has so long puzzled a great many wiser persons than myself. You have heard her report. She says that the deadly double of the Lord of the Isle is Peter Mapleton. If you will come with me for a few minutes, I will undertake to furnish you with the proofs of Fanny's assertions."

"Where do you propose to take us?" asked the Lord of the Isle.

"Aboard of a little steamer at Pool Anchor-age," was the answer. "You know how sheltered the spot is—how near it is to the shore."

"Of course we are at your disposal, colonel," said Harmon Mapleton. "We'll follow wherever you may choose to lead!"

"Come, then. The situation is critical. I should be sorry to lose a moment."

The Lord of the Isle and his friends had scarcely concealed themselves in the state-rooms of the *Una*, with Captain Klingman and the crew at hand, when they learned beyond all doubt that Mrs. "Wilkie" was merely another name for Mrs. Peter Mapleton.

Uneasy and anxious, she came out into the main cabin of the yacht to ask the captain if he had not yet seen her husband, and if he did not know what was keeping him.

Captain Klingman had barely had time to reply in the negative, when there was a hurried tread on the deck, and Peter Mapleton made his appearance, flushed and excited, followed by Gridley and Rossbrook, and two other members of the *Flying Glim* fraternity.

"Ah, there you are, captain," he cried, as his eyes rested upon Klingman. "Get under way as soon as you can."

The captain inclined himself and stepped to the deck, but it was only to summon, by a secret signal from the steamer lying near, a boat's crew of stout fellows, with Captain Bush at their head, who came swiftly across the intervening space to the *Una*.

"Such a chase as I have had to get you together," added Peter, as he dropped into a chair and looked around upon his confederates. "Yes, I am known as Mr. Wilkie, and have dropped the M name for ever. You must all find a similar cover, for there will be hot times here in the course of the coming day. Strange I could not find Dorie! It is on her account that I have

hung about here so long. I was bound to get hold of her if I could. Strange where she and the rest of them went so suddenly. I would have risked my life to take her away with me!"

He looked around and listened a moment, as if wondering why the boat did not begin to move, and resumed:

"I am not satisfied with that captain, Gridley and I want you to take his place, with Rossbrook as your assistant. We are going down the lakes to the St. Lawrence and thence to the ocean, and thence where we please. Such a sweet revenge as I am having upon that brother of mine! I have stolen his bonds and stocks and cashed them in Chicago! I have raised a handsome fortune by putting a mortgage upon his possessions in his name. I have brought him under the suspicion of the blood-hounds of the law who will arrest him before the day is ended and take him to prison! Ha! ha! what a stroke of genius it was for me to do all I have done in his name and guise and leave him to foot the bill! This is indeed a glorious revenge!"

His companions rejoiced noisily with him, gathering from his words that he had ample funds at his disposal, and that they were going forth to a long round of dissipation and amusement.

"But why don't that captain get her under way?" added Peter with an oath, as he sprang to his feet. "I must see what is delaying him. Ah! here he comes!"

He suppressed the angry greeting which at first arose to his lips at sight of the captain, who had indeed appeared at the entrance of the cabin, for there was an expression on Klingman's face which struck a sort of chill to the villain's heart.

"Why is it that we are not moving, Captain Klingman?" was what he said.

"For a very good reason, sir," answered the captain, "and that is that I am now acting under the orders of Colonel Gibson, the Chief of Police of Chicago!"

"The chief of police?" gasped Peter.

"Who is here to speak for himself," added Klingman, waving his hand.

A start, a glance, and Peter comprehended!

Chief Gibson stood beside him, with a countenance which rendered all words needless—with a countenance as stern and inexorable as destiny itself!

"The game is played, Peter Mapleton, otherwise Mr. Wilkie," said the colonel, as he produced a pair of handcuffs, while the Lord of the Isle, with Paul and his betrothed, and Wally and Fanny, came out from their concealment, fixing their horrified glances upon his disguised face and figure. "In the name of the law!"

A wild yell resembling that of a maniac, interrupted the words of the colonel, and Peter made a swift movement to his mouth with one of his hands.

"I defy you," he cried, gaining his feet. "I—I am too much for you!"

A moment he stood towering and reeling, and then he fell his full length upon the carpet of the cabin.

He had indeed taken a poison that meant almost instant death.

At the cries which succeeded, Mrs. Mapleton came hurrying out of her state-room.

"What is going on here?" she cried.

"Go back to your room, woman!" cried Colonel Gibson. "Your husband is beyond your aid. Sooner than submit to arrest for his crimes," and he held up to her view the handcuffs still in his hands, "he has killed himself!"

An instant only the guilty woman stood staring at Chief Gibson and at the excited faces around her, and then she fell beside the body of her husband.

There is little need to say more.

The money stolen from the Lord of the Isle was found intact in the mysterious "sole leather trunk which had fixed Klingman's attention, and in the course of a few days Harmon Mapleton was in possession of his bonds and stocks again, they having been sold in a "block," and the bogus mortgage was duly lifted from his fair domain.

Need we speak of the joyous wedding-day of Dorie and Paul, or even of that of the young pilot and Fanny Clymer? If so, it shall only be to say that never were hearts happier than were those of our young friends on that occasion.

Mrs. Mapleton never recovered from the shock she had received, but soon sunk into a dishonored grave.

If anything was needed to clear up the aspersions which had fallen upon the name of the Lord of the Isle, it was found in the confession of old Corry, who detailed at length the crimes of the entire fraternity of the *Flying Glim*, placing upon the shoulders of Peter Mapleton the responsibility he had so wickedly assumed.

It is hardly necessary to say that Gridley and his associates received the punishment due their many crimes.

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